Strange STORIES

15¢

OCT.

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

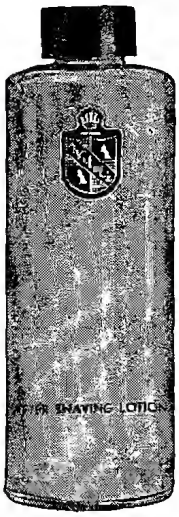
DEATH IS FORBIDDEN

By DON ALVISO

13 STORIES IN THIS ISSUE!

Most Amazing Introductory Offer Ever Made to . . . . MEN

Read every word of this Big Special announcement



Witol's After Shaving Lotion
Leaves the skin cool, zestful and refreshed. Mildly astringent; decidedly bracing.
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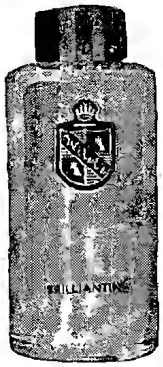

Witol's Brilliantine
Imparts a fine lustrous brilliance. Allows easy combing and keeps hair in place. Leaves a pleasant fragrance.
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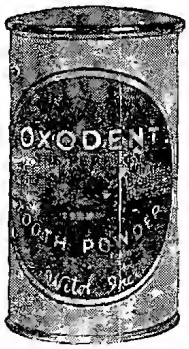

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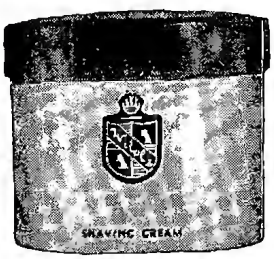
Witol's Skalp-Ade Compound
(Extra strong.) For the elimination of dandruff, the enemy of hair health and growth. List price $2



Witol's Brushless or Lather Shaving Cream
(Your choice) a rich smooth creamy formulation for modern shaving. Softens beard quickly. Spreads easily. Large jar.
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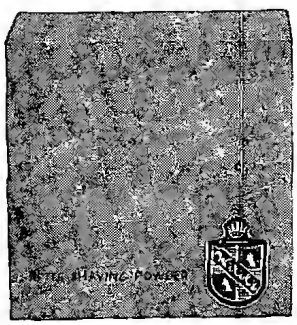

Witol's Best Grade After Shaving Powder
Removes that after-shave shine. Imparts a smooth velvety feeling after a close shave. List price 65c

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For aching, burning, tired feet. Brings quick relief. Makes footwork easy. (Large jar.)
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Pledger, Texas

1 **"One night** a party of us started out to spear flounders in the warm, shallow Gulf coast waters," writes Mr. Taylor. "As the tide ebbs away, the flounder remains on the sandy bottom, often in only a few inches of water.

2 **"Enjoying the sport,** we wandered farther and farther from land, trusting the lantern left on the beach with one of our party to guide us safely back.

3 **"Suddenly,** we realized that the tide had turned! Then, our guiding light disappeared. We didn't know which way to run—trapped in shark-filled waters!

4 **"Panic stricken,** we scurried about madly. Then, a pin-point of light far away winked reassuringly! Unable to fix the disabled lantern, the man on shore had sensed our plight, and luckily had a flashlight in his dufflebag. It probably saved us. From now on we will sing the praises of 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries—the kind you can *depend* upon in emergency. *(Signed)* *G. Brooks Taylor*"

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« « « 13 Gripping Tales of the Uncanny » » »

Strange STORIES

VOL. II, NO. 2

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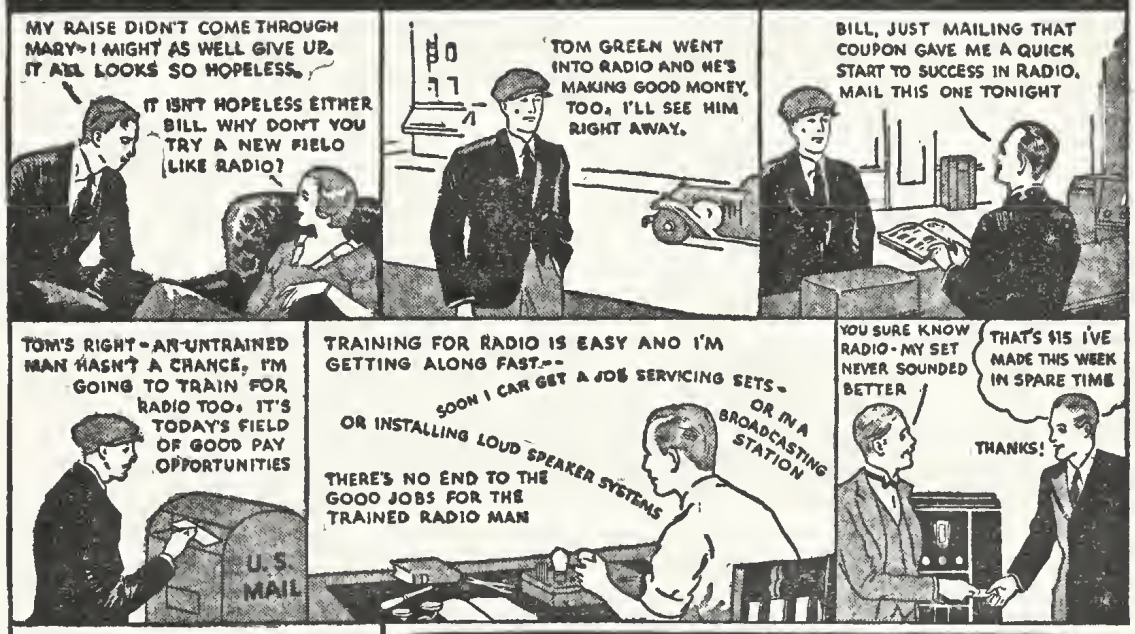
HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!



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By LUCIFER

Famous Authority on Witchcraft and Superstition

HYPNOTISM of the Unholy, devil possession, split personalities — can there be anything really demoniac behind these things? A beautiful girl becomes a fiend in a spell of satanic passion. . . . A Dr. Jekyll of righteousness is transformed into a diabolical Mr. Hyde for the joy of evil and the excitement of the damned. Can flaming lust be generated by disembodied spirits who, lurking in the invisible world of thought, suck upon the subconscious mind of their victims, like ghostly leeches, until the mortal consciousness becomes emaciated—and the will of the devil holds sway for a time?

Insanity! Evil thoughts and emotions of the living and the dead, you may say, cannot overpower the healthy brain of a normal man; mind cannot be subdued unless by physical distortion or disease.

But some people think otherwise—living people today. They have seen it work—they have felt the touch of demons. "Get thee behind me, Satan," is not a fantasy, but has some substantiation. The ever-present spirits of the damned, according to these people, never sleep. They seek expression and unholy glee in the bodies and minds of the living; they take possession if only for a spell, and enjoy the sensations of a stimulated mortal who yields to ungodly temptations.

Background for Satan

Biblical history tells of men and women possessed of devils; of demons cast out of a man into swine to perish in the sea; of the devil in a man saying, "My name is legion, for we are many"; of another saying, "We serve Satan, our Master."

Not alone have superstitious men believed in devil possession, but intelligent writers of every age have told many stories of strange powers of "demons that hover about us." And facts to substantiate these stories can be found in every civilized nation of the world. They are not limited to the dark countries of savage beliefs.

It is easy, of course, for skeptics to dismiss the question by attributing it all to insanity. But devil possession is not insanity, for usually the possession is only temporary—and the person so possessed is unable to help himself, although entirely conscious of the unholy control over his mind and body. In many cases, one actually sees fiendish faces of the legion of the damned.

Many tales are handed down to us of instances like these. Even American history shows that as late as 1747, a woman was legally put to death because "she was possessed of devils."

The Mad Swamp

But we do not have to depend on evidence of the past centuries. Let us go to modern French Indo-China. It is the year 1923. Colonel Marchand has been sent from France to Indo-China to take command of the French detachment there. With him goes his beautiful blonde daughter, Yvonne, eighteen years old.

All goes well for several weeks. Yvonne is the belle of the military colony. The natives tolerate Colonel Marchand, although he is hard and unsympathetic toward native superstitions. He belongs to the old military school of discipline and justice, fearless of man or the devil.

In his command, however, is an educated native corporal who knows the mysteries of the people of Indo-China. Several times he has suggested that the colonel be more tolerant of natives who to get to the hills beyond, have trespassed on military property in order to avoid going through a certain so-called "Mad Swamp." The colonel has refused to believe that this swamp is possessed of devils, and laughs at the native superstition that one who passes through that swamp at night becomes possessed himself.

One day, the colonel severely punishes a native for stealing. The man could have escaped the soldiers had he run into the swamp. But he chose capture, rather than face the legion of the damned.

"You dog," says the colonel, "since you fear it so much, for punishment I will have you thrown into the swamp."

The native begs for mercy, and seeing the colonel's beautiful daughter, he runs to her to intercede in his behalf. In grabbing her skirts to plead at her feet, the native trips Yvonne, and she falls. The colonel believes he did it on purpose and orders the thief taken to the edge of the swamp and forced in at the point of bayonets.

An hour later, the colonel is informed

(Continued on page 124)

F you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

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He maintains that all of us are giants in strength and mind-power, capable of surprising feats, from the delay of old age to the prolonging of youth, and the achievement of dazzling business and professional success. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized, our powers put to sleep by the suggestions of associates, by what we read, and by various experiences. To realize their really marvelous powers, men and women must escape from this hypnotism. The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing the mind of the hypnotizing ideas that paralyze the giant powers within us.

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The Institute of Mentalphysics, Dept. B33, 213 So. Hobart Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif.

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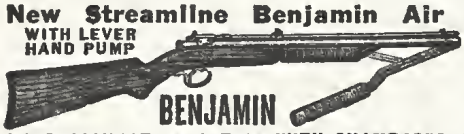
WITH LEVER HAND PUMP



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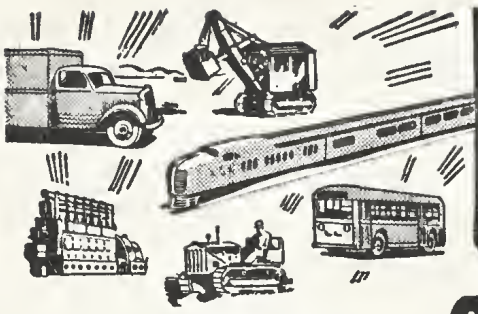

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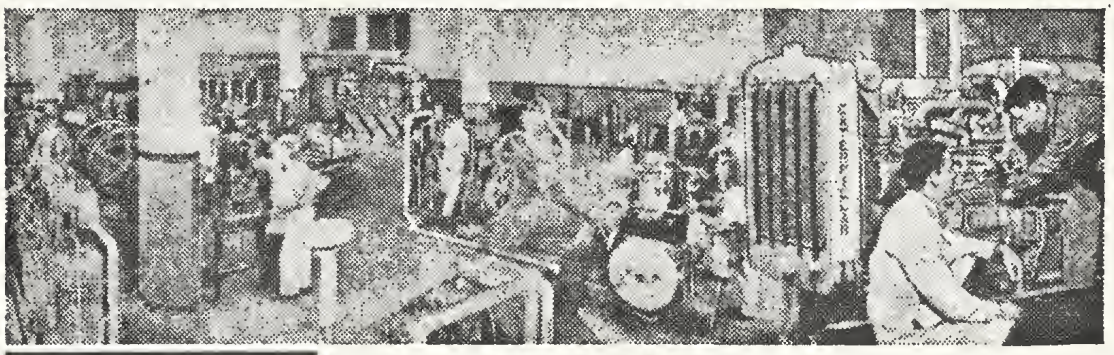

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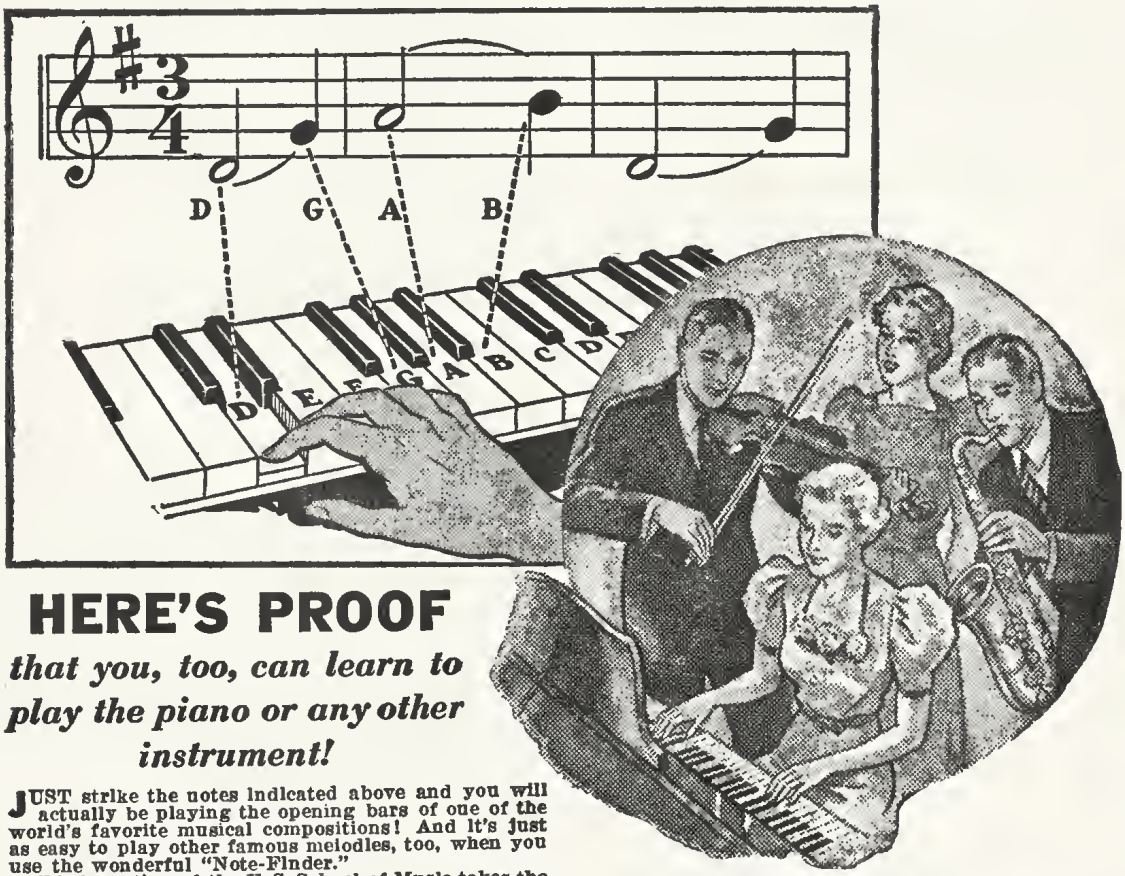

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DEATH

CHAPTER I

The Surgery

PERHAPS it is the coward's way: to put on paper what one cannot put into spoken words. Forgive me for leaving you so abruptly last night. You knew I loved you; and you asked the question I could not force my lips to form. Forgive me, too, for that. Before we meet again you must know a part of me which now you do not know, and be-

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yond that, my future is in your hands.

So—this letter, which will take time to write, because my right hand is not entirely healed and I cannot write legibly with my left. Have patience with me, Diane. . . .

Two newspaper clippings lie before me as I write this letter. One is crumpled and tawny with age, and the other smells freshly of ink from the speeding presses.

The first tells briefly of the sudden death of an American aviator while flying for Britain in the dark days of the World War.

The second clipping records, just as briefly, the fact that one August Weiss was beheaded in the historic fortress of Glust.

One is dated 1916, and the other 1939. Twenty-three years between, but to me they read as consecutive scenes in a fantastic and macabre drama in which I played a puppet's role.

No urge of confession impels me to

set down these facts, Diane. Rather, I proceed with the conviction that the work of so unusual a man as August Weiss should not go unrecorded; but far more than that, I have a definite though nebulous desire to put myself right with the soul of that famous adventurer, Jerry Knight—if, as I knew him, he had a soul.

In this letter, Diane, I am attempting neither to explain what happened nor to excuse myself. When you have finished reading, it is possible that you will have found your own explanation —and perhaps forgiveness for me.

IN JUNE, 1916, I was studying with August Weiss in his hospital in Burkhafen. To me, Weiss was almost God. I was so submerged in my desire to learn what Weiss could teach, so grateful for the rare opportunity of completing my training under so advanced a surgeon, that I scarcely knew there was a war. I could have forgotten it entirely had it not been for the unending stream of "special cases" flowing continually over the white-topped surgery tables at Burkhafen.

There we did not deal with the ordinary tragedies of war. Weiss had no time for amputations, riddled bodies, dragging entrails. Such simple casualties were left to lesser men, and that suited me, for I had covered that phase of surgery in an American university and had come to Burkhafen for higher, more complex things.

At rare intervals Weiss spoke his thoughts to me in queerly broken English, and each time my opinions of him became more confused. I used to watch his hands, strong and narrow, slim-fingered, dexterous and sensitive to the slightest touch. He said I had hands like that.

Once he remarked that surgeons' hands make good pilots' hands; strong fingers are efficient on the controls, and firm on the synchronized fire release of a machine gun. The scientifically trained brain can create and weigh thought with more speed than there is in the power dive of a Sopwith; faster than the lethal flight of a Vickers tracer.

You have asked me, Diane, why I have given up surgery. I will try to tell you. During my stay at Burkhafen I saw approximately three hundred "corpses" wheeled into Weiss' glass-roofed surgery.

I saw over half of these leave under their own power.

All these cases had been carefully selected. Germany's cry was for highly trained men; men skilled in the art of dealing death. Generals, captains, and the fighters of the air. These were the special cases rushed by plane to Burkhafen.

For instance: General Goerlach was inspecting field artillery in action when a Krupp shattered its breech. Goerlach was brought to us and when I saw the exposed faintly pulsing cerebrum protruding from the shattered skull, I was sure that even Weiss could do nothing for him. I assisted during that operation. For three hours I saw a thread of life untangled, spliced and suspended in the surgeon's graceful hands; saw brain-graft, nerve-replacement, and the complete transfer of half a human skull.

It never occurred to me then to wonder whence had come the anatomical replacements necessary for this seeming miracle.

I saw Goerlach leave three months later for the front.

I came to regard Weiss with a blend of fear and awe.

"The brain—the eye—the heart," Weiss used to hiss softly, as he indicated those organs by jerks of his long-fingered hands toward his own body.

Once I asked: "How about the soul?"

He chilled me with the beam of his mouse-gray eyes. "Ach! Iss it a surgeon you would be—or a preacher? A good soldier hass got no soul!"

I must pause, Diane, to rest the ache of my hand. Perhaps in time it will grow strong again.

IT WAS in December, 1916, that they brought Baron Eric von Goelke to Burkhafen. The baron and his Hell's Circus were the dread of the Western front. Allied sky fighters and Allied planes lay dead and burned

in the wake of this devil's crew. Seemingly invincible, the fetid breath of death followed in their propeller blasts.

Von Goelke was the Fatherland's hero, and his well known toast was repeated often by the fighting men of Ludendorff's armies.

That toast was: *"Der Tod ist verboten"*—"Death is forbidden."

But, as happens eventually to all such, the steely kiss which bore his name found its way to von Goelke's heart, and his plane went down. The crash shattered his legs and one arm, and spattered his post-central sulcus over the instrument panel of the crumpled Albatross.

And so—they brought him to Burkhaften.

I remember it well, because it was the same day that the English Sopwith was shot down behind the German lines. I have good cause to remember, Diane.

The Sopwith's pilot was the only Allied fighter who ever came to Burkhafen, and at the time I thought it was a little strange.

Von Goelke had been brought in first, and while Weiss was completing a retina graft on a submarine commander, I myself administered adrenalin to von Goelke, sterilized the tweezers and picked away the shattered bits of skull. Then I lifted the emergency dressing that had been applied at the evacuation hospital and saw that a fragment of shrapnel had torn half the left ribs away. To get at those bone fragments I lifted the exposed heart.

I witnessed the weakening and fading of the organ's pulsations. Fading to nothing—and I wondered what this would mean to the German cause. Eric von Goelke was the inspiration, the driving force of the flying Circus of Hell, and the Circus was Germany's ace card in the lethal game, the momentary balance between victory and sudden defeat. And I stood there holding von Goelke's *still* heart in my hands!

To the experienced, Diane, death is no deceiver. In the year I had spent with Weiss I had learned that there in his glass-roofed surgery no man was dead until *rigor mortis* claimed his flesh, and even then—but I will tell only what I saw.

Yes, I had learned many things there at Burkhafen. The most important to me, though I did not realize it till long after, was the certain eventuality that comes from constant contact with blood, the incessant touch of mangled flesh and pulsing human vitals. I was losing my touch with humanity. I was acquiring that lack of personal feeling which may be a distinct advantage to a successful surgeon, but which to me constituted a mental shock and changed the course of my life. I lost all sympathy with human suffering. I grew to regard death not as a catastrophe, but as a goal.

I became so calloused that a shattered body was no more to me than a group of cells in a test tube.

So I viewed the baron's remains without emotion. I knew the man was dead.

THEN they wheeled the Sopwith's pilot into the surgery. I saw the black hair, cut short, and curling close to the top of his head. I saw the indistinct pattern of perforations which had riddled his face. A concentrated hail of bullets had practically obliterated his features and passed through his brain. An orderly motioned me aside and the Sopwith pilot's table was moved over beside the baron. Doktor Weiss came in with Adolf Eberwalde, who was there at Burkhafen for the same reason as I.

Weiss looked at me sharply from his small mousy eyes, through thick lenses.

He said: "Ach! It iss nervous you are. See, your hand trembles. By surgery you are no goot today. To the convalescents upstairs you go. Eberwalde will assist me—with this."

I left the surgery, my disappointment smothered by another emotion. August Weiss was no man's picture of the mad genius, though even then gruesome things were being covertly whispered of him in the village. Under forty, Weiss was a man in advance of his time. He was, for a stolid Teuton, more or less given to normal hu-

man emotions. He had three loves: Surgery, Germany, and Katterin Weiss, his wife.

I never saw Baron von Goelke's body again. I did not enter the surgery for two days and two nights—nights during which the glare of the powerful overheads showed through the glass roof, casting grotesque shadows on the leaf spread of the sprawling lindens above. Nor did I see Weiss or Eberwalde during that time. Then an interne was placed on guard at the door of a special room opening directly off the surgery. No one passed that guard except Weiss and one trusted nurse whose name was Gretchen. I could only guess at the identity of the patient within that room.

Please understand, Diane, I am concealing nothing; neither am I intruding into this letter any wild conjectures.

I will record the facts; and you will judge them—and me.

Two weeks later, one midnight, while a storm raged outside and a deluge of rain battered down on the glass roof, I was busy in the surgery. The door of the special room was a little ajar and from the room came first a choked gasp, then a strangling, gurgling wail like the first cries of an infant newly born. Weiss was at the time in his own rooms in a far wing of the hospital. The sounds from the guarded room continued; became a voice. The guard looked once into the room, then closed the door and when his gaze swung to me I saw the glazed fright in his eyes, the trembling of his stocky body. Through the closed door the eerie voice drifted to my ears. A delirious babbling; meaningless words mouthed haltingly in German, and then a familiar phrase uttered with a strange and unearthly accent:

"Der Tod ist verboten!"

A scream cut into the night's stillness; a feminine cry that shrilled with hideous fright, frenzy, and fear-born madness. The door flung open and nurse Gretchen fled from the private room, her face twisted into a pitiful mask, her staring eyes wavering in an uncontrolled and insane gaze. I looked past her through the open door and saw the top of a curly black head encircled in an aura of bandage.

THEN Weiss came hurrying in with two orderlies. Weiss gave the nurse one short, all-appraising glance, jerked his gaze from her and stared through the open door. He barked a curt order: "Take her away! She hass gone mad!"

Two orderlies pinioned nurse Gretchen's wildly flailing arms, a rough hand stifled her cries, and she was led forcibly from the surgery. Weiss flayed me with a long, warning stare, and passed on into the private room, closing the door softly behind him.

The next evening von Goelke's wife, or rather widow, came to the hospital at Burkhafen. She was then about the age you are now, Diane. I was alone in the reception room when she entered. Her body was not clothed in mourning, but her soul was. Her face was drawn, her eyes tired, the tones of her low voice hopeless and defeated. She was weary, it seemed, of trying to conceal the emotions evoked by a loved one's passing. She looked at me closely, and said:

"So, you, too, are an American."

I said: "Yes, Baroness. You wish to see the Doktor?"

A little color swept over the chalky whiteness of her cheeks, and she glanced apprehensively around the room. She spoke haltingly: "I would like to see—to look at the—enemy pilot. His name, I am told—is—Jerry Knight."

I led her to the surgery and turned her over to the guard, wondering the while why I had so quickly and involuntarily assumed that the patient in the guarded room was the one she had asked to see. Wondering if she would be admitted, and if Weiss would upbraid me later for bringing her. As I walked away I heard Weiss' voice, angry, protesting. A half hour later the baroness came out and walked along the hall beside Weiss, and I saw the glare of some unspeakable hate in her dark eyes as she bade the Doktor a curt farewell.

I will skip a little unimportant time, Diane, and rest that hand again.

CHAPTER II

The Man-Muddle

CHRISTMAS EVE, 1916. August Weiss' son was born. The battle of Wurtz was at its bloody height, and German officers were falling like flies. By special order of Ludendorff, Weiss remained at the surgery. He did not sleep for three days and three nights, nor did I. We did not rest. We fought with forceps and scalpel in the surgery, while armies grappled with steel and explosives at the front. During that bloody Gargantuan struggle, Weiss' son was born and Katterin, his wife, died.

Thereafter during the first turbulent months of the new year, I saw a change in August Weiss, an emotional upheaval which tore him apart even as he had dissected other men. But Weiss still had three loves, deeper loves now, and they were Surgery, his dead wife, and little Fritz.

Came April, 1917, and America entered the war. Your country, and mine, Diane. I should have left Burkhafen earlier, but my ambition had held me. With Weiss I was learning what I could not learn elsewhere. The death grip on the Western front had not been a personal thing to me. Human bodies, shrapnel-ripped; human lungs, gas-burned; human lives snuffed out by thousands. These were not men to me; only material for the laboratory, "cases" for the surgery at Burkhafen.

Then it was too late. I was interned for duration. I was transferred to purely technical laboratory duty where I came in contact with none of the patients. I was watched. News was kept from me, and I did not know when the first doughboys ploughed their bloody way into the mud of Flanders' trenches. Eddie Rickenbacker and the others grappled with winged death in the clouds above me and I never knew.

One bit of information filtered through the barrier. Late one night as I left the hospital to go to my nearby rooms, a slim shadow glided from among the lindens and came toward me. I heard the low strained voice of Marthe von Goelke.

She was calling me from the darkness, and then from her bewildered lips I gleaned a hint of the secret of that ghastly December interlude during which Weiss and Eberwalde had labored two days and nights behind the locked surgery doors over the bodies of the German and the American. The flying Circus of Hell was in the air again, and their leader was—Baron Eric von Goelke!

"All Germany knows it," Marthe told me unbelievingly, and sadly. "And the men on the ground take new heart."

"And you?" I asked, striving to be casual. "You have seen him?"

She shuddered and for a moment I could feel the chill that surrounded her. She said: "No, only that one time—before Christmas. They will not let me see him." Then she gave way to ghastly remembrance, and the throb of her broken heart came into her voice: "Oh, Eric—why didn't they let you die. I—I think I am going mad—"

Hardened though I was, I trembled, and went cold thereafter when I heard von Goelke's name, the sound of it bringing back to me that scene in the surgery when I had held his still heart in my hands. I saw Marthe occasionally and she brought me news. Hell's Circus won new victories in the shot-torn air, and the Fatherland rejoiced.

MARTHE met me secretly, and an elusive comradeship crept into our clandestine meetings. Her manner told me that she sought me out as the only one who could possibly understand. She lived, I knew, with but one frail hope, clinging to all that was left for her of Eric von Goelke.

Then, during a disastrous infantry counter-attack, I was sent to a hospital near the front. The drone of motors drew my gaze overhead and I saw the tight wedge of Albatross fighters winging its way toward France. I could see the red devil's masks on their bellies; Eric von Goelke's coat of arms on the lower wing surfaces.

They flew low, and the black head and red beak of the vulture bird showed clearly; the centerpiece of the Baron's coat of arms.

The bats of Hell's Circus on their way to spit death in the air. There were seven of them going over—and six when they flew back. One crashed on the trenches in flames, and its pilot was brought in with the cooked flesh falling from his bones. The head surgeon forgot that I was an enemy American, or perhaps he depended on threat of the firing squad to ensure my loyalty. With torn bodies waiting in an endless line; with emergency surgery tables dripping gore while amputated limbs cluttered the floor around our feet, there was no time for puny precaution.

I looked down at the roasted body of the Albatross pilot. He was scarcely more than a boy, and he was beyond my aid. Even to me, a protege of August Weiss, it seemed impossible that any spark of life could remain in that seared flesh. But his charred lashless lids opened and I saw the dry skin crack like old parchment. I stared down into his wild, pain-crazed pupils, and felt the ghastly, hypnotic pluck of death in his set gaze. His voice came like the dry cackle of rattled bones and I withheld the opiate-charged needle, listening to his last words.

"That devil-charmed flying corpse —mask-faced cadaver—he—he iss not —von Goelke!"

My hand cramps on the pen, Diane, but I must hurry on. You will remember how on November Eleventh, 1918, the welcome hour of eleven was gonged throughout the world. As all things, even time, must end, so did this maelstrom of murder. The Skodas and Krupps haunched silently on their spades along the Western front. The drone of the Fokker, the Gotha and the Albatross faded from the sky, and the hateful tattoo of the Vickers was stilled. It was all over. The end of the war had come, and with it came the end of something for me.

Somehow I knew my hand would never hold a scalpel again; my fingers never prod the needle of mercy into quivering flesh. What I had seen and what I had been had sickened my soul. The words of August Weiss kept haunting my eardrums: A surgeon's hands make good pilot's hands; strong fingers—the trained mind—

I saw Marthe von Goelke once before I left Burkhafen. Her low husky voice had become the toneless echo from a tomb. Some chaotic hope gleamed in her deep dark eyes, and that hope seemed to manipulate the muscles of her death-pale face like skeleton fingers at the strings of a corpse marionette.

SHE spoke quickly, as though the words which hurried past her thin lips hastened to utterance before the hope which bore them should die unspoken:

"They have given him back to me. We are leaving Germany. We will go away — anywhere — far away, and so leave all this behind."

I noted that she said *him,* not *Eric,* and as she talked I could see her strong will struggle for sanity; could feel the warmth of her undying love for the Eric von Goelke she had known. I remember that the baron's hair had been straw blond and straight and that the bandaged head I had seen for that brief instant in the guarded room had been covered with short curling black locks. Wonderingly, I tried to reason: what, after all, made *Eric* the man Marthe loved? The brain which dictated his every thought and action? Or the arms that had encircled her; the flesh and bone and blood which could cast a stalwart visible shadow against the sun?

Perhaps you, Diane, being a woman, can find an answer to those questions. Perhaps it is neither the mind nor the flesh, but that elusive something which is part of each and yet foreign to both. I have heard it said that it is a man's soul which loves and is loved, but there, talking to Marthe, a haunting doubt assailed me. What if this man-muddle, this strange blending perpetrated by Weiss's scalpel, had no soul!

I asked cautiously: "He—he remembers you?"

She shook her head, a slow, barely perceptible motion. "He is, of course,

changed. But I have him now—*he is mine!* Perhaps in time—"

I heard myself saying: "Baroness! You are mad!" And then she left me, while I regretted my words, hated myself for any weakening of what frail hope she had. But each time I thought of her, a cold mockery crept into my thinking. Perhaps she would hear Eric's *words* in her ears, but the mouth which uttered them would be that of the American, Jerry Knight. While her love clung to a macabre memory of her husband, the arms that encircled her, the lips that pressed hers, would be those of another.

Then—home, and the contradictory, turbulent and fast-changing years after the War. Years which found many of us wandering, restless, unable to pick up the raveled strands of life. My eyes turned to the sky; my thoughts to the air, there seemed no other palliative for my uneasy and unsettled spirit. Surgeon's hands make good pilot's hands. I found that to be true.

There were months of skidding on the edge of eternity while flying a war-salvage Jenny. Barnstorming; test flights. Then a resurrected Bristol Scout and more hours and days and nights of precarious flying. Somewhere along the tortuous path of those uncertain years I met *him.*

CHAPTER III

The Sickle

HE said his name was Duke Bainlee, and his manner of saying it was the same as that of a man who gives him name as John Smith or Tom Brown. His life, like mine, was in the sky. He was silent as to his past and I did not question him. He too, had lost something, some part of him, and the loss had left him out of tune with the world.

He had a mask of a face, smooth and beardless; short black hair which curled close to his skull; and his eyes were unmatched and of no describable color. When I looked into those eyes something hypnotic swept over me; something which sealed my lips and my mind, preventing me from even wondering who or what he was. At the same time I felt drawn to him, and the casual quality of the strange comradeship which grew between us seemed a thing of destiny. Somehow it seemed that I had been waiting for him to come. He never wanted to talk about the war, and we got along.

The time came when Duke dragged me unconscious from the wreckage of the Bristol. There followed an interlude of pain spent in the now unfamiliar surroundings of white-painted walls, white-robed men and the nostalgic smell of disinfectants. Delay. Beyond that I didn't care. Duke had plans and when he spoke of them to me I agreed numbly, as though his will controlled the thoughts and desires of us both. Through cloud banks of delirium I heard motors droning in the sky. Spads and Avros and Sopwiths, and always that wedge of Albatross fighters with the devils' masks on their bellies, and the black, red-beaked vulture head on the wings.

Soon I realized that just flying wasn't enough. Duke's thoughts and desires were mine, and it seemed natural for us to seek out war. Any war, big or little, so long as there was strife. That quest led us through fleeting years during which I viewed passing time and events as an unreal panorama for which I had no feeling. I will not burden you with all of it, Diane; only that portion which I feel that you must know.

Duke was forever poring over old books of legend; the mysterious, and the occult. One night he read to me a passage translated from a Toltec inscription, and there was a strange light in his unmatched eyes. I still have the book and I set down that passage for you here, Diane, because I know that to Duke it had prophetic meaning, and it strongly influenced what was to follow.

The black bird of Death marks only the end of life in the flesh. To the fallen warrior the red-beaked reptile is the after-life; for within its black winged body the soul of the warrior comes to rest. Therefore let no man harm this bird-thing; for its curved

beak has been dipped in warrior's blood; its white-rimmed eyes are sacred emeralds, and all-seeing; its talons all-powerful, and its strong jet wings an armour, shielding the departed warrior's soul.

THE idea of the black bird seemed to obsess Duke Banlee, and because his will was mine, I obeyed his wish. We ventured on that ill-fated flight to the Southern jungles. We set down with a cracked cylinder too many miles from any hope of aid. We waited for despairing hours during which Duke neither spoke, nor seemed aware of my presence. Then the jet-black creature spiraled down from nowhere and lighted on the leading edge of the left wing.

It was larger than a raven, and yet not so large as a vulture. Its talons looked strangely like human fingers, oriental fingers with long, translucent nails. Its thin, streamlined body was surmounted by a buzzard-like head with white-rimmed greenish eyes and a down-curved, blood-red beak.

Duke tossed it a fragment of bread and it fluttered down off the wing. We began that nightmare journey to the coast, and during the first day the bird-thing circled over us. Now and then it settled on a dead, twisted limb ahead to stare blankly at us with its white-rimmed jungle eyes. The second day was the same and the third it lighted on Duke's shoulder. I had a haunting fear that it would pluck out his eyes, but at the same time I knew that in some mystic manner the bird-thing had become a part of him. Not that Duke became more understandable; rather his strange life-processes became more obscure. He seemed more complete, as though some missing part of him had returned, and yet the whole had the unearthly feel of the dead.

Duke stroked the shiny black wings, gave the bird his last crust of bread, and named it *Sickle*.

There followed seven days and nights of hell; exhausting days while we fought on, tearing our way through the unknown. The sting of insects and the bite of serpents. Days of moist oppressive heat, and nights of gelid horror when the fetid breath of the jungle brought the hideous yowl of prowling carnivores. When I was certain the end had come, I tried to laugh it off.

I said: "Well, a man can only die once."

And Duke stroked Sickle's shiny black wings and looked at me queerly. He answered, and he didn't laugh. "Of that, one should not feel too sure." There was the faintest suggestion of a hiss to his speech.

His words and tone jerked me up from a creeping lethargy of mind and I began to remember things about him which had heretofore been passed over by my thoughts. He seemed numb to either joy or misery. None of the clinging jungle things molested him; neither the heat of the day nor the cold of the night. But remembering brought only torture of the mind; even as the jungle tortured my body. It was something like delirium. My words sounded as an incoherent babble.

"That reminds me," I said, "of something—that happened a long time ago—at Burkhafen—"

HE whirled on me then, and the thing that was in his unmatched eyes whipped me like a spine-studded lash. Black Sickle slid down from his shoulders to grasp his shirt front with eerie talons, and spread its jet wings in a protecting fan across Duke's suddenly heaving breast.

"Burkhafen!" Banlee hissed. "Burkhafen! You—you were there?"

I nodded, dumb.

He drew a leather folder from his pocket and took from it what looked like a worn newspaper clipping. He glanced over the bit of paper as if to refresh his memory and spoke again.

"You were there—in December—1916? With August Weiss?"

I nodded again and tried to speak.

He stepped close to me, and spread his arms, and I quailed before him. He said: "Then you must know. Look at me! If you know, you must tell me or I will seal your lips forever!"

My stricken gaze went from his mask-like face to the bird-thing sprawled protectingly against his breast. A pathetically pleading note came into his voice and he went on:

"My hair—it should be light, and straight—but look—it iss dark and curling—" He snatched the leather helmet from his head and ran frantic fingers through the short-cropped mass.

I said weakly: "You were dea—you were desperately near to death there at Burkhafen. You were burned with fever. Men's hair has been known to change color after a serious illness—to grow in again curly after it has burned out and dropped from fever."

His voice rose to a scream. "You lie—and you know you lie! Look at this face! Iss it mine? And these eyes! Mine were once blue—or does my half-memory trick me yet again!"

I struggled for reason and calmness. My voice became steadier, but my wide-eyed gaze would not be torn from his mask-like face. That face shouted of grafted flesh, and in the technique of the plastic surgery I saw the mark of a familiar hand. I said:

"Those were frantic days, back there in December, 1916. Perhaps Weiss did the best he could—with your face. And your eyes—well—we worked with the materials we had at hand. Perhaps—"

"Tell me!" he commanded. "You were there! You should know! Who am I?"

I shook my head. Had I known positively at that moment that the mere telling him the truth as I saw it stood between me and death, I still could not have told him. I said: "I don't know. I was at Burkhafen, but I was not in the surgery—then."

He flung out his arms in a final gesture of exasperation. He turned and strode forward on the dim trail muttering audibly to himself:

"To have a little memory—so little—and no more." Then abruptly he switched to German, and despair reeked in his voice: *"Nein—nein! Es hat nicht sollen sein!"* ("No, no! It was not so to be!")

I struggled to my feet and followed him. When I drew near I summoned courage and asked: "The Baroness? Marthe?"

He gave me no direct answer, but hurried on. When a cobra lashed at us from an overhanging snag, he caught it around the throat in his bare hands. He flung it from him and it went slithering through the dank growth and I thought I saw fear in its saffron, lidless eyes. A prowling jackel faced us on the trail. Its quivering nostrils touched Duke's scent and as though pursued by racing fire the hungry beast went slinking off among the tangled vines and reeds. Even now I remember those things about him, Diane, and I know that quality about him, whatever it was, saved us both. He kept tramping on like a soulless zombie when I would have given up. We came at last to a village by the sea.

My hand again, Diane. I wonder sometimes; will it never grow strong?

CHAPTER IV

"Why Don't You Die?"

THERE followed interludes of danger and thoughtless daring. Time flowed past us; months and years; meaningless years. Then it was spring, the year 1935. Duke and I had been in China for almost a year. The two of us, and another flyer for the Chinese, Dick Walling, sat in a crude canvas shelter. Walling, a newcomer, peered out through a rent in the canvas, casting his eyes over the three ships crowded into the makeshift hangar. Then his eyes rested for a moment on the form of black Sickle, perched on the left wing of Duke's ship. "How long does a ship last in this man's war?" he asked. "That is, on an average?"

Duke answered: "As long as the pilot—on an average." And I knew he wasn't just being short. Young Walling hadn't learned that we didn't talk about such things.

The roar of a motor burst suddenly upon our ears. Duke took a fresh cigarette from the pocket of his leather flying jacket, and lighted it from the stub he snipped from his lips. The stuttering spat of machine gun fire kept time with the wet perfo-

rations that ploughed the tin roof of our hangar.

"A Jap," Walling said, excitement burning in his eyes. "And just one, all alone, by the sound of it."

Duke pumped a cloud of smoke from his lungs. His mask-like face showed no emotions as his thin lips moved mechanically. "They don't travel alone. Not Japs."

Again the wire-whine of a diving pursuit ship; the sudden deep voice of a powerful motor, followed by more leaks in the sagging tin roof as the second enemy plane came over. We stepped from the shelter as the third dived and zoomed past the hangar, its gun spitting steel-jacketed death. Duke tossed his cigarette to the damp earth and carefully ground it beneath his booted heel.

"Hell of a day for upstairs, but that I will haf to stop."

Walling cocked a curious ear to Duke's strangely twisted speech and then let his gaze stray over to the black bird-thing perched on the left wing of Duke's Boeing. "Going it alone again, Duke?" Walling asked.

Duke nodded briefly. "There's only three Japs." He called Sickle down from the wing, and with the bird cradled in his arm, crawled into the cockpit.

I went around front to spin the prop, and Walling said to Duke: "God! You want to fight the whole damn' war by yourself, and carry bad luck in your lap while you do it!"

The motor caught, coughed, and turned over. Duke pulled the throttle back to idle and let the easy propeller blast carry his words back to Walling. "Don't ever call Sickle bad luck again, kid. Remember."

A minute later Duke was on his way, roaring from the earth in a steep climbing turn.

WE gazed after Duke's ship, saw it engage the three Japs.

"That damned black feathered beast," Walling muttered. "Have you noticed how it crawls to his breast and clutches there while he's in the air? It hangs there with the wind pressing it close to Duke's body—like it was protecting him. God! The chances he's taking up there with those Japs—and they don't get him! I can't—understand!"

"Don't try," I said shortly.

Ten minutes later we watched one of the Japs go down—falling—burning. Dick muttered to himself: "God! See how he fights! Like a—a machine—or a man without a soul!" And again I could hear August Weiss hissing: "A goot soldier hass got no soul."

The other two enemy planes retreated over the far rice fields, Duke eased to a muddy landing on the sodden runway. We helped him wheel the Boeing back under shelter. Sickle fluttered up to take his perch on the wet left wing. Walling lingered for long minutes by the fuselage, thoughtfully running the tips of his fingers over the gaping holes around the cockpit.

The next day six Japs came over. Duke nodded to me and then said to Dick Walling: "Take it easy, kid. Don't try to do it all. Keep close to the edge so you can ease out if it gets too tough."

We took off on cold motors. By the look on young Walling's face I knew Duke's advice had been wasted. The young ones were always too eager.

We came back, after it was over, Duke and I—alone. Then, in that sagging hangar sixty miles out of Keng Chow, Duke held a bottle between his knees while he took a worn newspaper clipping from his pocket. As he gazed at it he was utterly unaware of my presence; some unearthly look stole over his face, and his mask-like features were drawn taut with poisoned bitterness.

My hand grips the pen aimlessly, Diane. I must rest the fingers so you will be able to read these lines.

Time passed, and we lived on. But something was getting me, and it wasn't the risks of the game we were playing. I saw Duke's plane raked from propeller to fin by a steel-sheathed hail of certain death. I saw him land at our field with the lenses shot from his goggles; saw him carefully fold his shot-torn helmet and

stuff it secretively into his jacket pocket. I stared for an instant at the short-cropped black hair curling close to his skull, and then swung my gaze to watch Sickle flutter up and settle on the bullet riddled left wing.

Duke got a gourd full of native liquor from somewhere and we began to drink. With nerves already taut to the breaking point, the native potion only served to bring my fatalistic thoughts to the surface. I raised my cup and said:

"Death—is forbidden."

Duke said: *"Verboten—ja. Gott-for-dam!"* He drank and I sat back wondering. I didn't believe in Toltec legends and I didn't believe in immortality. Something was keeping Duke Banlee alive against all odds; something I didn't understand—and it wasn't luck.

WHEN I spoke again my own voice sounded strange. "Out there I saw the smoke of tracers fanning your jacket several times. It's getting me, Duke! Why in hell don't you die?"

A fluttering sound came from the tent flaps. Sickle made its awkward way to Duke's shoulder and perched there. After a while Duke said: "You saw strange things there at Burkhafen. But did you ever see a man die twice?"

I held myself rigid against the impact of his words. I thought of August Weiss's ghoulish delight in his skill in brain-graft. How much did Banlee remember? Enough to drive him to futile insanity; or only sufficient to steep him in a brooding desire for revenge, a lust to kill?

I chanced a question. "Do you remember about the war—about your part in it?"

"In a way I remember, yess," he answered promptly. "Perhaps as one remembers a nightmare. I remember my part in it—vividly—but it seems—it seems like something that happened to someone else."

"And after the war," I questioned further. "For that little time when you traveled with—with Marthe—"

A bitter curse shot from his thin lips. He sprung to his feet, facing me, his shaking arms outspread, his strong fingers tensely curved and trembling.

"Marthe!" he hissed, "her body was like an angel crushed in my arms! But her mind! How it tortured me! Always lashing me to remember—prodding a torment of questions at my brain till it ached!" He sank back to sit on the edge of the cot again, weary and exhausted.

"Where is she now?" I asked. "Do you know?"

[*Turn Page*]

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The only answer he gave me was a blank and uncomprehending stare. He took the worn newspaper clipping from his pocket, held it to the light and his thin stiff lips moved slowly, as the lips of a child who reads something he can neither understand or believe. I had another drink and stared out into the black African night. Sickle rubbed his shiny wing against Duke's smooth, hairless cheek.

I must put down the pen, now Diane, lest the pain of my cramped hand make these words illegible. There is, after all, but a little more.

CHAPTER V

Bird in Hand

THIS was in December, 1938. The Spanish front out of Velez. We had been at this base five days. Some strange intuition that the end was near had made me keep track of time. It was the evening of the fifth day that I saw Duke and the Spanish girl talking, over in the shadows of the shell-wrecked cathedral. Her name was Valere Estanez, and she looked childishly young and terribly beautiful when I saw her face for a moment in the dusk. The way her eyes went up to Duke; the way she fluttered around him. With their homes and lives in ruins, there wasn't much for these people to cling to—except love. And Valere thought she was in love with Duke Banlee.

Two days later came the new recruit for our death-loving squadron. Again we were three. He came in the dusk of the evening and my heart sank a little when I saw how young he was. A German boy; another one who had gotten out of the Fatherland just in time. I didn't know then the cause of his disfavor. He was just one of the unwanted.

He had clear, honest gray eyes and a well-formed face where a strong, sandy beard showed against the tanned skin. His manner told me he wasn't in this for adventure alone. He was looking for something; some part of him that had been lost.

When I read his name from the identification card my glance went involuntarily to the fallen column of the cathedral where Duke sat talking with Valere Estanez, and for a full minute I didn't breathe. I saw how Valere's wide eyes were held fascinated, almost hypnotized by Duke's blank, compelling gaze. I pitied her. She was searching for love and had found only dominating fear. I read the name on the card again just as Duke and Valere started toward us. While they were still yards away I saw the German boy's gray eyes set on Duke's mask of a face.

A moment later I said: "Duke, this is our new man. His name is—Fritz Weiss."

Heavy silence shrouded us while Banlee's unmatched eyes clung like leeches to Fritz's face; his strong young body. Long moments while no one spoke and I saw Valere's deep dark eyes stray to the German boy, flutter away and stray back again. Duke turned momentarily to me. A new understanding marked his graven features, but when I looked into his blank eyes it was like peering into the empty caverns of a bleached skull —like gazing into phantom eyes where there was no substance; no soul to halt the beam of my stare.

Duke spoke suddenly to the German boy: "You fool! Why did you have to come—here?"

Then Duke stamped away toward the village and I knew he was going to the Cantina Mañana to get drunk. Valere Estanez faded into the shadows of the ruined cathedral and a few minutes later I saw Fritz Weiss wander that way. Later a rumbling cart drawn by a weary mule came laboring up the slope from the direction of Velez. I sat on an upturned oil drum, thinking and waiting.

The cart drew near and the figure of a bent and withered old Basque became clear in the half darkness. A woman sat beside him. The weary mule slowed to a stop and the woman climbed down and came toward me. She came close, peered at me and said:

"Don't you remember me? It is I —Marthe."

I nodded, and couldn't speak. The shivers of premonition ran up and down my spine. Things had been quiet around Velez. Franco was battering at Madrid; it seemed only a matter of time until his legions would win through, and then our turn would come. The strained quiet before carnage and storm. Through months and years I had watched the battle going on within this creature I knew as Duke Banlee. Opposing forces, unwisely thrown together, struggling for assertion. And here on the eve of battle was Baroness Marthe von Goelke, wife of the man whose still heart I had held in my hands, and Valere Estanez, and there was Fritz, the son of August Weiss.

Marthe whispered: "He is—here?"

I said: "Yes. Over at the cantina. You don't give up easily, do you?"

She leaned back against the wing tip of Duke's pursuit. Black Sickle eyed her menacingly, shuffled farther over on the wing and the lids drooped over his white-ringed emerald eyes.

"For a little while," Marthe said, "after we left Germany, I think he almost remembered. For a little time he was my Eric—almost. I thought I could hold him—keep him remembering. Perhaps I tried too hard. Soon he was no longer Eric, and he wasn't—the American. He lives—he can think and act—but he cannot love, because he has no soul!"

"Doktor Weiss?" I questioned. "Have you heard of him?"

She nodded wearily. "He has never been the same since Katterin died. He is bitter with hate for his country, now ruled by tyranny. Fearlessly bitter—and that is dangerous. Even now, he is in prison."

I looked past her and in the pale light of the newly risen moon saw Fritz and Valere standing close over by the ruins. After a silence Marthe turned, followed my gaze, and said: "That is why I have come. Fritz came searching for—for *him*, hoping there would be something he could do to right the wrong of his father. Fritz would have been a great surgeon too, if the purge had not made of him an exile. But Fritz must be saved from this. He is innocent of wrong; he is not to be blamed for the misguided patriotism of his father."

Marthe was gone when Duke stalked back into camp. The next evening, with the moon, Valere strolled back to linger by the ruins. Duke was there waiting for her with black Sickle perched on his shoulder. In the moonlight I could see Duke's mask face, and at times even a ghost of a smile played there. A suggestion of pleading warmth crept into his toneless voice, but Valere seemed afraid; afraid of Duke and of Sickle. Fear and awe were in her eyes when she looked at the black bird-thing. Its beak was so red, as if it had dipped stealthily in blood, and the wafted breeze from its fluttering wings was heavy as the gallows breath.

I SAW Fritz Weiss come back from the village. He looked terribly young and alive, walking straight in the moonlight. Valere heard his step, and turning, ran madly to him. Duke stared for a moment and then whirled away, walking woodenly toward the cantina.

Two nights later Marthe came again. She spoke a low greeting to Fritz and he rose, smiled and bowed stiffly. Marthe walked straight toward Duke Banlee and said softly: "Eric!"

Poured into the tones of that spoken name was all the hope, the pleading and the love of Baroness von Goelke. The man before her only stared silently. She spoke again: "Eric. Don't you—can't you—remember?"

A strange inner emotion shook Banlee, something gigantic, tearing and rending. Then Sickle moved. From his perch on Duke's shoulder the black bird-thing flung its body forward with the speed and force of a diving plane. Marthe winced and staggered backward but made no sound as the bird crashed against her breast, sinking its finger-like talons into her flesh. I sprang forward but Fritz Weiss was faster. His strong hands gripped Sickle and tore him away, flung him roughly aside.

An animal sound that was neither word nor wail came from Duke's thin lips. For moments our eyes welded to his mask-like face. His features twitched and worked to the play of his searing emotions, and noted the drawn and stretched smoothness of the skin. My racing memory bridged the long years between Burkhafen and the present, and all that had gone in between. I remembered all the monstrous things I had been afraid even to think, and taken together they made a pattern, unbelievable perhaps, but clear.

The blankness had gone from Duke Banlee's eyes and instead the fire of madness burned. I led Marthe back to the village, bade her farewell, and begged her not to come again. Word had reached us that Franco had smashed through. Tomorrow, or the next day at the latest, his Italian Capronis and German Fokkers would be free to sweep over us at Velez.

Christmas day, 1938. I have nearly finished, Diane, and over this, the last scene, I will hurry quickly. The zero hour had come. While I hunched over the controls in the cockpit of the Sikorsky I glanced over at Duke Banlee and knew fear for the first time in years. The unfeeling shell I had grown at Burkhafen was broken away. Again I could feel and know compassion and sympathy. I was afraid for myself, and for Fritz Weiss who sat straight in his seat on the other side of Duke Banlee. I felt release; I was no longer a thanatophile —in love with death.

The Capronis and Fokkers already filled the air when we took off. We were three against a sky-full of Franco's mercenaries. I saw at once that Weiss was a real flier. I noticed his hands. Strong, sensitive hands, that might have been dexterous with scalpel and forceps. Now they were firm and efficient as he gripped the stick and the fire-release of the cowl-gun.

DUKE used to tell the kids to stay on the edges. He didn't say that to Fritz. In that last struggle there weren't any edges. They were all around us and Fritz was in the thick of it. He would dive in with throttle wide, motor roaring and gun belching a stuttering challenge on the Fokkers and Capronis. Duke Banlee fought as he always fought; as only Jerry Knight and Eric von Goelke had ever been able to deal death in the air. Duke fought as a gambler plays; without fear, without mercy, and without emotion. He dived on a Caproni and it went down. Two Fokkers tailed him, spitting futile steel into his back. Duke's motor roared into an Immelmann and as he came over on his back I saw the high-speed Conrad vomiting chrome-steel messengers with unerring aim.

The Fokkers fell off, drunkenly, throttle wide, earthward with corpse-hands at the controls. Duke zoomed out of a loop and passed me. I saw kill-lust in his eyes; saw his dagger stare slant to Weiss, who was engaging another Fokker. As Duke sped past I saw Sickle, clutched against Duke's breast, held there by the force of rushing air. Next a Caproni faltered in the range of Duke's cowl-gun. There was a fluttering of fabric as tracers ripped it back and forth. I saw the youthful face of the Caproni pilot. Another kid. Dark olive skin, wide eyes. He would have a mother over in Calabria, and brothers and sisters. Perhaps a sister as youthfully bewitching as Valere Estanez, almost as beautiful as yourself, Diane. The Italian's helmeted head jerked back. Blood gushed from drawn-back, pain-twisted lips. The Caproni went down, a hell of flame.

Duke eased away from the thick of the fight. He came out of that maelstrom of wings and guns and roaring motors along with Weiss, a little behind and above. I thought: the moment has come. Duke's cowl-gun let out a short blast as though feeling for the target. Weiss turned his head and looked back at Banlee. Fritz's face; wide, ruddy and alive. Something in the expression of that face; bewilderment, surprise, but no fear.

For a speeding instant Duke Banlee's face flashed before me and I saw a visage I shall never forget. I saw it first against the white surgery table at Burkhafen; it was the face of Baron Eric von Goelke, and now on

those suddenly transformed features, I read hate, and the lust for revenge —and madness.

Came a stuttering blast from the gun of a diving enemy Fokker. The sound of Fritz's exhaust cut off like a played out record. I saw Fritz's Sikorsky slip off to the left and away from Banlee; saw Banlee follow. He cut in toward me to keep on Fritz and again I saw his mad face and the clutching bird-thing pressed to his breast. It seemed that all his hate welled up to vengeance on the son of August Weiss for the thing that had been done to him in the hospital at Burkhafen. Just as Sickle had pounced upon Marthe von Goelke, so was Duke diving now toward Fritz Weiss in the helpless Sikorsky.

THERE was no time for sane reasoning, Diane. Somehow I remember Fritz and Valere as I had seen them in the moonlight by the shattered fragments of the marble column at the shell-razed cathedral. Duke shoved the throttle wide open and dived on Weiss's powerless, falling Sikorsky. I heard the staccato stutter of Duke's gun, and then—

He was turning in a sharp bank directly before me. I saw that red-beaked black vulture bird clutched to his breast and I recalled dimly the weird Toltec legend of the black birds and the souls of departed warriors. It wasn't marksmanship; there was no time to aim. Two fast pursuit ships, whirling in a merry-go-round of death.

I squeezed the release in a crushing grip, heard the bark of the gun on my cowl, and while my insides became a vacuum, fetid waves ran up and down my back. I had the abhorrent feeling of firing slugs into the putrefying flesh of a corpse.

The black bird on his breast fluttered and its horrific death-cry was heard over the roar of motors; over the crash of guns. Jet black feathers were whisked out into the wind by the propeller stream. A small cloud of black feathers that bobbed and floated on the troubled air. Duke's ship seemed to go out of control. I saw his face once as he spun past me; his bloodless head hanging over the cockpit edge. His limp arms lax, dangling.

I saw Fritz Weiss gliding earthward, to safety. Then a Fokker and two Capronis cornered me. I felt the stinging numbness of projectile impact; bullets grazing my skull and tearing the bones and flesh from my right hand which fell helpless from the control stick. Dizzy nausea and waves of darkness, rolling down out of the sky to engulf me. Stalling, spinning, falling, and always in the dim background a hellish phantasmagoria of whirling propellers, black feathers, and swooping wings. I do not question the Fate which brought me consciousness barely in time.

Later, I learned what little there was to learn from a family of Basques back in the mountains were Duke's ship had landed. It had floated to earth in a normal glide, as if some ghost hand manned the controls, and the Basques had found the body, unmarked and without wounds, with nothing to show why he died. Black animal blood clung murkily to the breast of his jacket, and he held the corpse of the strange red-beaked bird in his dead hands. He was buried according to the name on his identification card—as Duke Banlee, and the remains of Sickle rest with him in the grave.

So you see, Diane, how it was. That strange bird. Were the Toltecs right? Was the baron's soul in that ungodly feathered beast? Or—the soul of Jerry Knight? How can I know? When the black bird-thing was killed, all that was left of two men died. And—I killed that bird, Diane. So perhaps I ended the half-life of Jerry Knight.

I FOUND the clipping in Duke's duffle bag at the hangar. It was cut from the Kansas City *Tribune* of December 13, 1916. Since you lived in Kansas City at the time, you doubtless saw the same news item yourself. A picture of a young man with short, black hair which curled closely to his scalp; under the picture the brief announcement:

Word has been received through the British Embassy of the death of Jerry Banlee Knight, formerly of this city. Knight joined the Royal Air Force in January of this year, and at the time of his death held the rank of Leftenant.

Details of the embassy's information are meagre, stating merely that Knight was shot down behind the German lines during the forenoon of December 11th, in an engagement with enemy planes.

Leftenant Knight leaves a mother, Mrs. Hanna Knight, and a ten-year-old sister, Diane Knight, both of this city.

I shall burn the clippings, now, Diane—this one and the one briefly dealing with the beheading of August Weiss by a Nazi executioner—for I want to forget them if I can. If, that December day at Velez, I had known there was a Diane Knight, I might not have killed the bird—and *him*. How can we ever know what we *would* have done? I saved Fritz Weiss, saved him for the great good he can do mankind with those surgeon's hands of his—his father's hands. And saved him—for Valere. They were married this morning, and their hopes are high. They are coming to have dinner with me tonight, Diane. Can I—dare I hope you will be here too?

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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THE CRAWLING CORPSE

A Novelet of Bizarre Sorcery

By ELI COLTER

THE CULT OF THE DEAD

By GABRIEL WILSON

Author of "Balcony of Terror," "Earth-Venus Twelve," etc.

His face became contorted

MY VILLA lies behind a high brick wall, with a tall grilled gate at the entrance to its driveway. It was up this driveway, lined with palms and bordered with flowers, that I saw my young nephew approaching on foot. He had arrived at Port-au-Prince from New York a few hours before to spend several weeks as my guest.

I watched his approach from my doorway with a strange sense of coming trouble. There was something in his laughing, eager face that boded daring and inquisitiveness, two attributes most likely to precipitate disaster among the native Haitians. His grinning abandonment was accentuated by the jaunty swing of the camera hung over his shoulder and a row of pencils standing ostentatiously out of the breast pocket of his coat.

"I've come!" he said gaily, as he swung up my piazza steps. "And I'll

Dark and Terrible Are the Inexplicable Mysteries of Black Haiti—and not to Be Probed Too Deeply by Mortals!

not go until every Cult and Creed of Haiti is registered here—and here!" He tapped his camera and then his pencils; and he winked at me as we shook hands.

That evening, with the eerie night sounds of the tropics floating in our open windows, I warned my nephew uneasily.

"Harry," I said, "you must realize this is not America and you're not dealing with Americans here. This is a strange country, filled with weird cults, superstitions, penalties and mysteries. Only a fool would try to pry into them, unless one uses the utmost tact and caution."

He grinned. "Sure, I know. And tact is my middle name."

"Things get under your skin here, too, Harry, if you play with them," I warned. "Perhaps it's the native's earnestness, their own sincere belief in the existence of these things that are piffle to you and me. I don't know. But I do know I've given them a wide berth."

"Coward!" he laughed.

"Fools rush in," I countered.

BUT the lad's light-heartedness was irresistible. I joined his gay laughter with a chuckle of my own. Then I sobered once more, for mine was a real responsibility.

"If you're set on getting authentic information and pictures, I'll take you to see Dr. Banè. He doesn't connect himself with any cult, but being a native, he has information and influence where I have none."

"Right," Harry agreed. "When will you take me to him? Could we get hold of him tonight? You see I'm keen to get started."

"We'll be off tomorrow morning early," I promised. "But you must keep in line and don't try anything fancy."

He knew what I meant. "You're the boss," he said.

The next morning we went to downtown Port-au-Prince and across from Mohr & Lauren's offices to the office of Dr. Banè. He was there, alone, and expecting us, as I had sent a message to him earlier.

"This is Dr. Banè," I told my nephew. "Dr. Banè, my nephew, Harry Mason."

They shook hands.

An hour later, I put down the pamphlet I had been perusing and listened and watched the incongruous sight of my clean-cut, ultra-American nephew and the black, quietly intelligent Haitian, with his queer injection of realism into what he was discussing.

Dr. Banè was saying: "This necromancy—the uses which they make of various parts of the corpses—has been verified, of course, a condition which the American government is intent on blotting out."

"Yes," Harry agreed, "I know that. Some facts about their struggle with the natives here have appeared in military reports of the Caco Guerilla uprisings, but the reports were brief. No details. But the little that seeped out, intrigued the public. It's my job to get some real dope about it."

"Well, now let me see what will be of further interest," Banè reflected as he accepted one of Harry's cigarettes. My nephew took one himself and lighted first Dr. Banè's and then his own. Dr. Banè smiled as he puffed it and gave me a sideward glance. I could see he liked the boy.

"Their use of the corpses—" Harry prompted.

"Oh, yes. They rub the grease made from the dead brain upon the edges of machetes and tools."

"Why?" Harry demanded.

"Let's call it a superstition. They believe that in this way the implement will become intelligent—have the ability of thought—and cut more accurately. The same thing applies to the head of the hammer, so that it will know where to strike. And upon the sights of a gun, to insure the bullet of reaching its mark. I know of an actual incident, quoted here by natives.

"The grease from the dead brain had been rubbed on the gun of a young warrior. He was shot in battle. As he fell, his comrades swear they saw his gun, without this warrior's assistance, rise up, aim, and fire. The enemy at whom it aimed, was shot to death, whereas our hero recovered and lived to tell the tale.

"To him, the dead brain upon the sight of his gun, saved his life. For if the enemy had not been instantly killed, the young warrior most certainly would have received a fatal shot from his adversary, who was closing in upon him. It all sounds very fantastic, doesn't it? But these things are accepted here without question."

HARRY leaned forward. "That's the brain," he said in a low voice. "What about the rest of the body—the hands and feet and arms?"

"They make *ouangas* of them. In other words, charms, used for various purposes.

"So that's what a *ouanga* is," Harry said softly. "I wondered. I read about them in a book back home. It called them a charm, used for both good and evil."

"Yes," Dr. Banè agreed. "The *ouanga* is their chief weapon — for good or evil. Naturally, there are many incidents involving them, gossiped among the natives. One of them I know will possibly interest you."

"An *ouanga* used for evil?"

Dr. Banè smiled again at Harry's swift, punchy question.

"No," he said. "Let this be a time it was used for good. The young woman who had had the charm placed about her neck at one of the meetings of the *Culte des Morts,* was leaning over about to pluck some berries. Suddenly she felt a jab, as though someone were nudging her. Then another. She stood up, startled, for there was no one in sight. Again the jab. It was in the back of her neck. A warning?

"She was superstitious, and suddenly she remembered she was wearing a *ouanga,* supposedly sent her from her dead father in return for the good she had done him by leaving food and water for him at his grave. A dead hand, severed at the wrist, was strung on the *ouanga* at the back of her neck; and it seemed as though one of its fingers had nudged her, trying to warn her of danger."

Dr. Banè paused to light a cigar as he stared at Harry.

"And that was all?" Harry asked.

"No, that wasn't all. The young woman had become alert with this realization. She looked swiftly about. Then, behind some shrubs a few feet away, she saw the evil face of the man who had murdered her father, and who had never been apprehended. She let out a scream. The brutal man crouched, started toward her. She was helpless here, far from other humans, with nothing but the birds and the beasts to hear her cry.

"The murderer was upon her now; he clapped his black hand to her mouth, his other hand held her in an iron grip. He was facing her, struggling to draw her against him. In horror she looked down at her breast where it seemed that her *ouanga* there was moving. A portion of a human wrist and forearm was strung on the *ouanga.* Its bone, six or eight inches long, was blunt at one end, but it was splintered at the other into a sharp point.

"The bone lay flat against her chest, but now as the murderous man clutched her to him, distinctly she saw the dangling *ouanga* bone turn itself outward, so that it was horizontal between them. Its blunt end pressed against her, and as the murderer's arms drew her close, she heard him scream. He had been stabbed to the heart by the sharp-pointed bone, and he fell dead at her feet. Her magic weapon, needing neither her brain nor will to guide it, had saved her life. She went screaming hysterically to the small town and told her tale. It was one of a great number, very similar."

A strange silence followed this gruesome anecdote. Harry sat staring before him, lost in thought for the moment, weighing the possibilities of these mysteries of Haiti. At last he said:

"I had thought that, for evil purposes, they included the poisonous leaves of the machineel tree. But this is quite different."

DR. BANE smiled. "Don't take it too seriously. We're only quoting the tales of ignorant superstitious natives." Then he sobered. "But, of course, we have no way of being sure one way or the other. It might be ex-

ceedingly dangerous for you to attempt to verify, or discredit, what I've been telling you. These things are best allowed to remain with those who comprehend and seek them. But for you and me—let them remain mysteries in which we dare not delve except superficially.

"You would get no more actual facts than I have given you. And if you forced yourself into one of these meetings, you would have to believe that you would be dealing not only with these superstitious natives, but possibly with the Unknown. The chances are, one way or another, you would not live to put it before your readers."

Why had Dr. Banè said this? What had prompted him to fear for Harry, just as I had feared? Was he reading the man, or the future, or was it some mysterious instinct which warned him for the reckless, inquisitive young man's safety? I did not know. But the fact he had felt as I felt, put me doubly on my guard for Harry's protection.

"This cult is little known. Perhaps there is no other man here who could tell you these things, other than its members," he added.

"What's the name of this particular cult?" Harry asked.

"*Culte des Morts:* Cult of the Dead. Papa Nebo is its oracle, delving in deep matters in which I have no interest and yet at which I dare not laugh."

"But I must have the pictures," Harry said, almost as though he were speaking to himself. "Gosh, what a scoop for me. And I could write it. There'd be warmth, a feeling behind it."

I coughed and yawned. This thing had gone far enough: it was beginning to give me the creeps. Dr. Banè saw that I wished the interview terminated. He stood up, and Harry rose and faced him.

"These pictures," Dr. Banè said solemnly, "cannot be obtained, either by you or me. I advise against trying it, most emphatically. This cult assembles at night only. In the daytime this Papa Nebo is a black man, mild, impersonal. His picture would do no good, and the danger to yourself might be extreme."

We left a few moments later and returned to my villa. I must say its normality and quiet were in strong contrast to our visit with Dr. Banè. I had left his office with an unpleasant, slightly foreboding sense of being too close to an ugly reality: a side of the life here in Haiti, both incomprehensible and revolting, yet casting its shadow of possibility and crowding mystery.

I felt also, in a sense, a defilement in even the impersonal discussion of the hellish cults of this devilish island. An almost overpowering impulse was upon me to force Harry out of it all; to forbid him, as his uncle, to even so much as take his camera, should he go off on any pretext from my grounds. He had some facts. Let them suffice.

But I held my peace, merely suggesting that he take Dr. Banè's advice. I took the precaution of ordering Chauvet, my houseboy, to shadow Harry whenever he left the grounds alone.

A week of quiet went by. Harry had discovered in my library, books by Paracelsus, Eliphas Levy, Frazer, Swedenborg, William James, and Blavatski; a rich field indeed for esoteric research and for anyone interested in comparative religion, folklore, mysticism, and magic. He seemed satisfied in sopping up their contents, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

During the month that followed, he began to discuss these books with me. At first our talks were brief, impersonal. Then they took on a more argumentative turn. The boy's interest was a thousand times increased since his arrival. I realized with a pang that the books had been like fuel to the fire. I wished fervently that he had never read one of them.

AT THE end of the month, he had grown noticeably thinner. The fire and excitement in his eyes were intensified. He would go for strolls without me quite often now, slipping out without my knowledge. Yet Chauvet would come back faithfully and report. It was obvious, from what

Chauvet said, that these strolls were scouting expeditions.

They were inocuous enough until one night less than two months after his arrival in Haiti. I was lying in my bed, tossing restlessly, when Chauvet rapped sharply upon my door, asking permission to see me with all speed. His voice was high-pitched. I could discern an excitement and fear in its shrill tone.

I threw open my door. Chauvet rushed in, breathless. He told me in gasping sentences that Harry had discovered the habitation of Classinia, the Papa Nebo of the *Culte des Morts*. Secretly he had planned to attend a meeting, under guise of being one of the *papaloise*. He had dyed his skin with juices, obtained native garb, and at this instant he was awaiting the arrival of members of the cult to join them and attend their meeting, his camera hidden in the folds of his costume.

There was no question of his danger. In less than ten minutes I was dressed, and Chauvet and I were on our way, riding through the mountains between *Morne Ronis* and *Les Verettes* until we came to a ravine below the trail. There, huddled behind a clump of banana trees, was the habitation I sought.

"Wait here," I admonished Chauvet, "but come if you hear a disturbance."

I had decided upon a brash course. Everyone on this island knew or had heard of good Dr. Banè, and although he was not a member of any cult, he was respected and trusted not to betray them to the American government.

I slid down the slight incline and came to the entrance to the door. A man from within saw me and came to me.

"Bon soir, blanc," he said, eyeing me furtively.

I introduced myself and told him of my interest in the *Culte des Morts*, and of my credentials from my good friend, Dr. Banè. He looked at me with suspicion, wondering doubtless, if this were a trick of the government's to get evidence. A woman appeared in the doorway and he told her in his native tongue, my request. She gazed at me aggressively, unpleasantly. But a growing panic over Harry, tensed me.

I forced my most amiable manner. I was desperately afraid for him, here in the hands of these crazy fanatics. Or, if you will, these evil necromancers.

The sky was overcast. I felt a few drops of fine rain. In another five minutes the heavens would open and there would be a downpour. Brief, perhaps, but torrential. The flashes of lightning in the distant sky were answered with low rumbles of thunder. All evening there had been promise of this storm. Harry must have grown acquainted with its warning signals. But he was obsessed, as fanatical in his way, as these natives. Dear God, I prayed that he might not reap their vengeance at his brash intrusion into their mysteries!

Finally the black man turned and gave a grudging assent to my request. A sense of awe came over me, for I knew that few, if any white men, had ever witnessed this particular scene. It was not a religious ceremony, nor had it anything to do with Voodism. But it did have to do with the magic workings of the dead!

A shuddering chill crept down my spine as I followed my guide into the hut and down a dark corridor behind it. It was evident that the moment was at hand; the *papaloise* were gathered. Was Harry behind this door we were approaching, ready to risk his life? And if he were, would I be able to control these people and explain to them the lad's harmless purpose, nevertheless an unforgivable affront in their sight to their dead and their magic?

MY guide opened the door upon a narrow, long room, very faintly lighted. I caught a glimpse, as I entered it, of a table at the far end, filled with bones, a shovel and pick. All about me, were prostrated natives, moaning, writhing, supplicating their dead. I searched frantically for Harry. I was sure I should recognize his broad shoulders. But there were fully a hundred natives gathered here, and the light was too dim

to discern more than blurred blobs of figures. My guide continued forward, but I shrank back to the wall in the rear, hoping to attract as little attention as possible.

My gaze continued to rove swiftly about. There was a wooden cross in the front of the room, painted like a totem pole and wreathed with a feather boa. Before it were rows of lighted tapers, slender, brown, crudely made candles of the sort placed on graves and in the niches of tombs. But my glance at these things was casual.

There was an increasing alarm upon me, for no one could look upon this sight and remain calm and unaffected. Joined with my fear of these natives' wrath, was the questioning fear of the actual power of the supernatural. Was Harry about to outrage some creed of these dead upon whom these suppliants were to call?

A line of *ouangas* hung on pegs on the wall behind the table or altar. Their grisly parts, consisting of pieces of corpses, were strung in abandoned disorder, one part upon the other. Were these *ouangas,* of which Dr. Banè had spoken, to be used for good or evil?

My forehead was burning. I knew that the malarial fever I had been hoping to avoid, was upon me. I felt weak and ill, and it seemed to me there was a stench here of newly dead flesh. The storm burst, and the rain came down in torrents, thundering upon the roof covering the low-ceilinged room.

Lightning flashes brightened the interior weirdly, giving an outré sheen to the uplifted black faces with rolling eyes and mumbling mouths. The claps of thunder were like the mighty wrath of a vengeful God. Suddenly I felt a cold sweat upon my forehead. God, what I would have given to have been back at my villa with Harry safely returned to America!

In the fitful, murky light my attention was suddenly arrested by the slow progress into the room from a side entranceway, of three figures. The tall central figure, which moved slightly in advance of the other two, was garbed in a soft white skirt. Above it, was a long-tailed black frock coat and the incongruous crown of a high silk hat. Then I realized this must be the symbolical Papa Nebo, the oracle of the dead whom Dr. Banè had described to us.

As he drew nearer to the altar and its torches, I saw that he was wearing black smoked glasses, making his face gruesomely inscrutable. I shuddered involuntarily at the sight. He came forward, his ebony face gleaming in the faltering light, an unlighted cigar protruding grotesquely from the side of his mouth.

I wanted to laugh; not with mirth, but a frightened hysteria. Things were about to happen here unmentionable, blood-curdling things which would be sufficiently horrendous even if I were only what I was posing as—an onlooker. But I was not a curious onlooker; I was an uncle with a real terror for the safety of my dead sister's son, here to save him from the rage of these writhing, moaning fanatics. Or worse!

Again my gaze swept the prostrated forms before me, and I prayed that the lad had changed his mind and was not here. Yet I knew that I prayed in vain.

THE two figures on each side of Papa Nebo, slightly behind the oracle, were in no particular garb. Both were women.

Papa Nebo came to a stop when he reached the totem pole cross with its grotesque feather boa, and the lighted tapers sent a strange, ephemeral light flickering across the features of this tall and straight black man. It seemed to imbue him with an eerie unearthliness, as he stood so stiff, hands extended, the black goggles glaring his imperviousness at what he was about to do.

The two women separated and went slowly to the pegs behind the altar, and each took down a *ouanga.* I saw now that they were like long, disjointed necklaces of parts of the human corpse. The women handled them with complete unconcern, even as I felt myself go sick at the sight of this mutilation of the dead. The two women came forward and stood, one on each side of Papa Nebo, facing, as

he did, the supplicating blacks before them.

Involuntarily, I drew back closer to the wall. There was no mistaking this scene as it lay before me at this instant; it was the picture of the *Culte des Morts!*

Then there was a snap and a flash of lightning. It was within the room! But almost before the thought formed itself, I knew that it was not lightning. There was a sudden scream of adulatory terror from the swaying, moaning mass of fanatics. The entire mass of blacks started to their feet at the oracle's wail and shrill babble to the waiting dead, those dead who were here and ready to hear the supplications of those who had come to ask favors of them.

And now I saw Harry. He was standing in the folds of a kind of hanging, like a portiere, his camera outside the folds, its light attached on the top and to the side. The lightning, this last flash within the room, had been his, of course, as he took the prized picture!

I would not let my terror take control of me. Did anyone else in this room know what I knew? Or did they think, as Papa Nebo in his prayer appeared to think, that some *dead* enemy had dared intrude into this gathering with defiance and desecration?

I never knew what they thought. I stood trembling against the wall, watching the natives scrambling toward Papa Nebo, listening to his words. The order came from him that they must get to the cemetery and consult with other of their dead, and when he, with one of the lighted tapers held high before him started slowly forward, the blacks backed sideward, leaving a path for him. He went down it, followed by the two women with the *ouangas*. Even with the black glasses, he found his way unerringly.

I looked ahead, to be sure Harry had made a retreat, as Papa Nebo headed for the place I had seen Harry an instant before. I did not see him. The excitement had heightened my fever; the suspense had been too much for me. I felt the floor swaying beneath my feet. My sight blurred.

My hands trembled as I braced myself against the wall. I don't know how many minutes I stood there, watching the departing ebony-faced, shiny-eyed blacks, with their mouthing moans and supplications as they shambled forward. It seemed an eternity. My strength was ebbing. If only their long line would come to an end, so that I could get to the other side of the portiere and find Harry. He must have seen me from his hiding point and would be watching for me.

At last they were gone, with never one glance at me in my dark recess to the side of the room. I could hear their distant chant as they filed out of the house and down over the hill to the cemetery, the weird sound coming back in waves, mingling with the spatter of the lessened rain and the intermittent low rumbles of thunder.

I KEPT my eyes on the portieres. I tried to start forward, but my legs would not carry me. I slithered to the floor. I watched, with a kind of fascination, the low sputtering tapers, and wondered where Harry could be.

Then my heart suddenly pounded, for there, crawling on all fours, I saw him. At first I thought his camera was about his neck. Then I knew it was not his camera, but a *ouanga!* Who had put it there? Was it one of his jokes?

Why was he in such a posture? I tried to call to him, but my throat seemed to contract. Then I saw that as he pressed forward, he would drop, then struggle up to drag himself further toward the altar.

With a superhuman effort, I mustered my strength. Harry was in trouble. He was unable to stand up. Now he had ceased moving. God knows how I managed it, for my fever was raging, but I got to my feet and staggered toward the front of the room, not far from the altar, where Harry lay. At last my voice came.

"Harry—dear God, what has happened?"

He did not answer. In the distance I could still hear the monotonous chant of the blacks. Finally I was within a dozen feet of Harry. I saw

the *ouanga* about his neck. I did not know whether there were any of the poisonous machineel leaves strung with the mutilated fragments of corpse.

As I reached him, he seemed to go into a brief convulsion and threw himself onto his back. The incongruous black of the juices covered him. His native garb was open at the throat. I stood looking at him, at the sweat on his forehead, hanging there in great sparkling beads. His eyes were open; they met mine appealingly, baffled.

Then my attention was arrested by a hand from a newly-dead corpse, which was strung as part of the *ouanga* about Harry's neck. Was it my imagination, or was the hand moving? I saw the fingers twitch, then start moving slowly, dragging the remainder of the *ouanga* after it. I tried to scream. I stood paralyzed with unbelieving horror. The hand was moving higher! Now it paused at Harry's throat, poised, and sank its fingers into Harry's throat like a pouncing cat. I saw his eyes bulging.

The next instant I was on my knees, tearing at the hand, but it was like steel. I had no power to stop its action. It tightened its grip upon Harry's throat. I heard his gurgling, suffocating efforts to breathe.

I was like a madman now, ripping at this unholy thing, dragging at it, thrusting the *ouanga* from about my poor nephew's neck and panting with my effort. But the hand clung, strangling the youth to death. His bulging eyes were glazing. His breath stopped. I let out a cry of anguish. My nephew was dead!

I swayed on my knees before him an instant. Then I was swallowed in merciful oblivion. . . .

I was in bed at home in my villa, when I recovered consciousness, with Dr. Banè bending over me. At first I wanted to think it had all been a horrible nightmare, but Dr. Banè's compassionate look convinced me that it had been no nightmare, but stark, tragic reality.

We discussed my poor nephew briefly. His body had been found near me. He had been strangled to death. There was no *ouanga* near him, no hand at his throat. The statement of Papa Nebo was that some frenzied, frightened native might have strangled him, but he would take no responsibility in the matter, Dr. Banè told me.

The Haitian physician and I gazed long and intently into each other's eyes. And I knew that he was not surprised at the facts I told him.

"If only he had heeded," he said. "I told him they were deep matters, at which I dared not laugh!"

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Next Issue: VIGIL, *the story of a Soul-Destroying Threat,*
by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

KAAPI

The Fatal Trumpet Blasts, Profaned By Woman's Eyes, and a Jungle Spell is Cast when a Dark-Haired Maiden Dies

By MARIAN STEARNS CURRY

Author of "The House of a Thousand Loves," "The Peacock Fan," etc.

AT THE moment, I might have thought the whole thing a figment of my imagination, had not Hubert's actions proved otherwise.

His grip on the steering wheel tightened so suddenly that the car veered, knocking my cunning new hat into an even perkier angle than I had given it originally, and loosening one of my blue suede slippers. He righted the car, the expression of surprise on his face giving way to another of an entirely different order, his heavy black brows drawn together, the outline of his jaw tense.

Up the winding road, from the direction of the large white house we were approaching, came the controlled, resonant, melodious boom of what was unmistakably a native drum of some primitive people. The strange, rhythmic sound drifted out on undulating ether waves. Something within me responded to it startlingly. My blood seemed to quicken and run more warmly through my veins, carrying with it a barbed sting of fantastic horror wedded to a wild, barbaric joy.

"Hubert!" I cried. "Listen to my home-coming music. A wedding march for the famous traveler's bride. I

I saw it clearly in every detail

didn't know you had a native drum out here."

Hubert brought the car to a halt at the foot of the steps. He turned to me incredulously. "You mean—you heard it, too?"

"Why, yes," I answered wonderingly. "Why not? Haven't you a native drum here?"

Hubert shook his head. With the stopping of the car the sound of the drum had died out. Cold reason told me that we had been fooled by some disturbance in the motor. But later, when there was no motor running . . .

WE had come home. To our first home together. And in the delight of it, I forgot everything else.

We chatted gayly all through dinner, finding it heavenly to be alone together in the country peace and quiet after the noisy adulation of crowds that had followed Hubert about in the city. We had our coffee and cigarettes in the library.

The library is really a trophy room and book room combined. I had, from time to time in the few months I had known Hubert previous to our marriage, seen most of the things he had brought home with him in his years of travel; but tonight in prowling around the room in the fascination of getting intimately acquainted with my new home, I chanced upon some queer looking objects that were new to me. I called Hubert's attention to them. He strolled over and put his arm around me.

"Oh, those?" His eyes darkened. "They are the sacred trumpets of the Waikano tribe of Amazonian Indians. In their native haunts a death sentence is automatically imposed upon any woman who so much as catches a glimpse of them."

"Why?"

"Just because she is a woman. That's out where men are men, and women are cattle."

Hubert looked bothered. He told me afterward that the unpleasantly vivid recollection of the booming of the drum as he had last heard it along the Amazon, knowing what it meant to the Indian girl in his canoe, and to himself, also, if they were caught—coupled with the sound of it, so oddly out of place in these staid midwestern hills this afternoon as we came up the drive—struck him with fresh force then. There was no drum like that here. Yet he had heard it. And I had heard it. I, who had never been to South America!

He stood looking at them in puzzled fashion, these peculiar trumpets. He was good to see. A fine figure of a man, passing one hand perplexedly through his thick, dark hair.

"These trumpets are the only ones of their kind out of the Amazonian district," he went on. "I promised faithfully when the chief, after great hesitation, agreed to let me have them, that no woman should ever be allowed to set eyes on them. That is why I have never put so rare a find in a museum. Somehow he was the sort of man one keeps faith with, though he was only a savage."

"But that's pure superstition!" I protested, amazed and amused, for Hubert is a curiously hard-headed person. "A promise like that would mean nothing except in their own country."

"I gave him my word," he repeated with finality. "Besides, superstition or no, the trumpets actually do seem to have power. I saw one woman die, most horribly, after she had looked upon them quite by accident. And she was miles away from them at the time of her death, too. An Indian girl, in my canoe."

I looked at him curiously, and resolved then and there to have the whole story some day soon. For there was a story here. A somber one, to judge from Hubert's manner. Fortunately, I had no conception then of the way I was to learn it. I tried to cheer him up.

"I am a woman," I said. "And I've looked at them. And if you think I'm going to die while still so young and so fair, you're going to be disappointed, my dear!" I laughed.

But even to this day, I shudder to think how I experienced all the fear and agony of death, physically and mentally, in the unbelievable aftermath. My joke roused Hubert from his mood, however. He laughed, too,

and kissed my hair, the top of my head being about on a level with his chin.

"You're mine, which makes you immune," he said serenely. "If I didn't think so, I would most certainly have drawn the curtain over the glass of the trumpet case before you came into the room, as I always do when my parties of visitors include ladies."

"What are they for?" I asked, regarding the prohibitive trumpets with a superior air from the security of his arms.

"Each one represents a different jungle spirit supposed to be literally embodied in its one particular instrument. When a man breathes into it, the spirit is roused from dormancy into a living power, and pulsates physically with the one who rouses it. The natives keep them buried deep in the river from one tribal ceremony to the next. I wonder—it is strange that we *both* heard the reverberations of that drum. I never heard it before in this country. And you had never heard it at all. Yet you knew what it was the moment its sound reached your ears. It might almost seem that this thing is definitely connected with your coming here, with me."

"Hubert, don't be silly! It was mental telepathy. Or—or something."

I led him away from the trumpets that disturbed him so, and stopped farther along the wall before some open shelves on which stood some others of his treasures.

"What is that? Poison?"

I pointed to a painted earthen bowl paired with a stoppered bottle containing a brown liquid.

"Why, no. That's *kaapi*, a native drug, or drink. It's from the Amazonian district, too. It is served to men and women alike in their informal dances, and to the men attending the regular tribal ceremonials from which all women are excluded. The ceremony, which involves the trumpets by the way, is called *jurupari*, and is an initiation into a sort of free masonry.

"It takes a native to like *kaapi*, really. And to yield properly to its influence, too. The stuff had no effect on any of the white men in our party. Curious, wasn't it? We all tried it, and it tasted so bitter I could hardly get it down. I remember one time when the rest had gone on and I stopped alone with the tribe for a few days to get some data on it, the others to pick me up when they—"

Had I but realized it, he had already started to tell me the story I so wanted to know. If he had finished telling it, I might never have found out all that I did find out. For I would not have drunk the *kaapi*.

BUT Hubert was interrupted by a knock on the door. He stepped back to the trumpet cabinet, curtained and locked it, and left the key in the lock.

"Come in," he said.

"Three gentlemen in the drawing room to see you, sir," said the maid.

"Three gentlemen!"

"Yes, sir. They say they are a committee from a London museum—"

"By George! I wasn't expecting them for a week yet!" Hubert was dismayed. "My reports aren't in shape, though all the material is in order—what day is this, anyhow? I must be mixed in my dates."

"Why, it's the twenty-second of September!" I told him in surprise.

We had celebrated my twentieth birthday royally that very day, before we drove down here. He had given me a magnificent ruby pendant, and teased me about being an old man's darling. Hubert, you see, is twenty years older than I.

"September twenty-second! Twenty years ago today I was—"

He broke off abruptly. I saw instantly that the date had a peculiar meaning for him, one entirely apart from the fact that it was the anniversary of my birth. And I know now that our discussion of the trumpets and the *kaapi* had recalled it to him.

The pieces of a very queer puzzle had already begun to fall into place.

"One gentleman said he was sorry to intrude on you so soon after your return," went on the maid, hesitatingly. "But because of illness in his family he must go back to England at once, and will start to New York in the morning."

Hubert turned back to her.

"I see. Of course. Tell them I'll be right down."

He took my hands.

"Well, this is a devil of a mess! The first evening in our new home, and I have to spend it working in the study. I've got to see them, dear."

I laughed, feeling very wifely and heroic.

"That's all right, dear. I knew what I was letting myself in for when I married an explorer. Run along. I'll stay here a while and then go up to bed."

"Stout fellow!" he said appreciatively, and was gone.

THE room was quiet after he left, a brooding, country quiet entirely new to me. I missed the racket of the frantic city streets beneath my windows, missed the clamor of the telephone and the constant, easy chatter of friends who dropped in nightly.

My restless mind turned with tremendous desire to the trumpets again, forbidden fruit being ever irresistible to my sex. Nevertheless, I'll admit that now I was alone with them, I approached that curtained cabinet with considerable trepidation. I hesitated to profane it with my feminine touch, in spite of the fact that I had jeered at superstition before Hubert. But the temptation was too great. I turned the key and swung the door back on its hinges. Nothing jumped out at me.

There they stood in the rack Hubert had made for them, fourteen of those mysterious trumpets, each of a different length. Some were quite small, others taller than I. They consisted of hollow wooden mouthpieces lengthened by rolls of bark and bound together with native rope. I wondered how they would sound when played. The insidious suggestion that I try blowing through one seemed to me to have been put into my mind by Satan himself. It so startled me that I fled down the line of shelves in something closely resembling panic.

My next, and involuntary, stop brought me directly before the bottle of *kaapi*. Was it Fate? I do not know. I looked at the bottle. Hubert had said emphatically that it was not poison, but that it was terribly bitter. To me the *kaapi* looked like dark beer. I am fond of beer. It would be fun to taste it and see for myself what it was like. The notion grew on me. I had a delicious daring sense of mischievousness. Nothing more. In view of Hubert's own statement I was taking no risk.

Slowly, with all the absurd caution of a child stealing jam, I took the earthen bowl from the shelf and dusted it carefully and fastidiously with my flame colored chiffon handkerchief. With steady hand I removed the stopper from the bottle and poured a little of the brown *kaapi* into the bowl, lifting it to my lips.

I barely wet my mouth with it, having no desire to drink anything really distasteful. The tang of it was strange, but not at all unpleasant to my tongue. I remember thinking amusedly that Hubert probably didn't like beer. I did. The bitterness to which Hubert objected was not apparent. Probably the potency had deteriorated with the passing of time.

I poured out all the rest, all that was left, and drank deeply. My ears hummed. I drank more, casting caution aside. It seemed to me I had found in the *kaapi* something my physical system had craved all my life, unknown to me. I wanted all of it, and I greedily finished the *kaapi*.

It made me a bit dizzy. There was a chair near the trumpet cabinet, and I sat down on it, resting my head against the high back and gazing abstractedly at the sacred trumpets which were immediately in line of vision. As I sat, I was startled for the second time that day, to hear once again the soft, dreamy, vibrant rhythm of the native drum.

I believe that I shut my eyes. I am not sure about that, but I think I did. At any rate, I became lost to all else for the moment except the drum sound, which swelled in volume until the whole place was filled with its delirium, and the drum itself gradually took definite shape before me. I saw it clearly, in every detail, as if I had long been familiar with it. And somehow—somehow I knew it denoted danger. Danger for me!

A huge, hollow log, minutely split the entire length, with five holes along

one side, it swung on cords suspended from four carved, ornate posts and was beaten with two clubs, the knobby ends of which were covered with a crude form of rubber. The drum centered a large building, the high, thatched roof supported by rows of pillars; and the room was lighted by huge, burning splinters of wood stuck upright in the ground at more or less regular intervals, and by blazing masses of pitch daubed on poles at each far corner. There were railed compartments all around the amazing room, each with a smoldering campfire representing the family hearth. Hammocks hung in every occupied compartment, used in place of beds. There was a family assigned to every inhabited compartment.

Little by little the scene sifted into further detail before me. I began to see with some clarity through the smoky haze filling the room, though I felt unreal, as though I were living an ancient nightmare over for the thousandth time. Something special, I did not know what, filled me with a violent, primordial joy of living, while at the same time I was subjected to an almost animal-like fear.

Around the drum, young men with bronze skin and features of Mongolian cast danced in groups of three. Each young man played on a set of bamboo pipes, nine in number, which he held in his left hand. His right hand rested on the shoulder of the man nearest him. Each one, smeared liberally with red and blue paint, wore a girdle of curved, polished bones, a necklace of jaguar teeth, and a strand of polished nuts around his left ankle.

As the pan-pipes shrilled, the rhythm quickened, and every youth stamped heavily with his left foot, his anklets rattling tantalizingly in perfect time to the music. The music itself grew wilder, more eerie. The dancers postured in frenzied ecstasy, stamping and playing, with savage abandon that stirred my own blood into a primitive passion.

I found I was standing in a cluster of young women, attired, like them, in a six-inch bead apron. It imposed upon me no consciousness of immodesty. A human body swathed in cloth here would be a monstrosity, a sinister hint of a deformity that must be concealed. I knew that. Together we struck hands and swayed as the young men danced.

One by one we approached the trio of our own selection, tucked our heads beneath the outstretched arms of the men, and thus linked together, followed pace and steps they set us. Faster and faster we danced! Higher and eerier shrilled the pipes! My head spun. Out of the surrounding gloom one face stood out alone before me.

It was the face of Kandi, the medicine man. He was resplendent in a towering headdress composed of feathers plucked from the bodies of the most beautiful and gorgeously hued birds of the jungle. He it was who watched me every single second as I stamped and shuffled in glorious exultation between the vigorous, sweating young bucks, his beady black eyes glittering hatefully in an otherwise impassive face, flagrantly painted.

HERE, in Kandi, was the materialization of my fear.

Yet there was something more. Something—something was going to happen. I thought about it, searched for it in my mind. I ought to know what it was. I did know. But I couldn't remember.

I glanced across the room to where the men sat, the women being segregated near the drum. In the midst of the men was one painted like the rest, but without native ornament. My heart beat spasmodically, then nearly stopped. It was Hubert, his white body gleaming in the dusk.

Here was the source of my unbridled joy. Kandi was the source of my fear, but Hubert explained my joy. Yet my attitude toward him was humble, almost subservient. I must worship him from afar. There never could be a bond of any conceivable sort between us. And for some reason, incomprehensible, I was afraid for him. Whatever it was that was going to happen, it concerned Hubert. Like most primitives I did not reason. I only felt. Instinct warned me to watch Kandi.

All at once the dancing stopped. From a not remote distance, a strain

of wailing, melancholy music halted us all like magic.

The women who had children snatched them up and joined those of us who had none as we all but trampled each other down in our panic to get through the one broad, open doorway the building afforded. We ran blindly into the forest. Two men herded us before them. Not a word was spoken. The darkness was so thick it was like a hot black blanket. Nothing was to be heard except the thud of bare, calloused, running feet, the sobbing breath of the frightened, awe-struck women, and an occasional whimper from a scared baby that was quickly hushed. Tropical growth crackled against our faces and stung our legs and bodies viciously, as though the jungle spirits were whipping us on before them.

I RAN mechanically, reluctantly. Farther and farther I dropped to the rear. I did not want to go. Desperate as my situation would be if I were to be found, I had to go back! Something was on foot, even now, maybe, in that huge room that presaged trouble. Trouble for Hubert. Hubert! I must get back, at once, somehow. And I must get there in time to do something that was meant for me alone to do. I did not know what it was. I only knew it was so.

It seemed to me that I had once known, though. None knew better than I that it was as much as my life was worth to turn back. But there it was. I must elude the guards, first. That in itself was no easy task, for it was as much as their lives were worth to let one of us escape their vigilance. But the guards, and what happened to them, did not matter. Nothing, no one, mattered but Hubert.

I managed to work my way to the outer edge of the crowd of milling, rushing women, and then when the blacker shadows gulped us down, I left them and crept aside into the bushes. There, with the blood hammering in my ears and my breath bated, I waited motionless until I was sure they had all gone past me, women, children, and the ruthless, eagle-eyed guards.

Only when I was sure they had gone did I carefully, silently set about making my way through the blackness and tangled undergrowth as only a jungle bred native can. Inch by inch, listening every second for a possible pursuer, I snaked my way back to where the forest met the outskirts of the clearing where we lived.

From where I was I could not see into the room, but I knew that Hubert was still there. What were they doing to him? My idol. My adored one. I had to know! But how could I go further without being discovered? Men were posted at the four corners of the outside of the community building so that none might enter, or even approach, unseen. I despaired, and as I sat huddled disconsolately in the brush, trying to scheme, I was trapped.

I saw a formal procession of men coming single file from the river bank, each one carrying a sacred trumpet. Upon these trumpets no woman might look and hope to live. And I saw them! Even the thought of Hubert could not sustain me in that moment. The vision of Kandi's cruel, gloating face swam before my mind's eye, and I cowered low, shutting my eyes real tight and clasping my hands over them to keep them from further sinning. It was all I could do to keep from moaning aloud in my abject fright.

But the damage had been done. I was going to die! Even though my tribe should never know what I had done, I would die, because the jungle spirits would know, and would kill me without human agent. Could Kandi save me? He was in love with me, but no man could marry a woman of his own tribe. According to our laws it was incest. I had known for days that he suspected that I loved Hubert. He hated me for that. He hated Hubert, too. And Kandi was as wicked as he was powerful.

And then I knew! That was why I feared for Hubert. He was in danger because of me, though he did not love me. Naturally not. To him I was just another native woman, all of whom looked pretty much alike. But Kandi did not realize that.

And what could he not do to Hu-

bert under the subtle privileges of ceremonial ritual! The very fact that Hubert was an utter alien laid him liable to anything Kandi chose to introduce into the customary course. For Hubert, together with some native boys who had reached the proper age, was to be initiated into the tribal mysteries tonight. Here was the danger I had sensed, but could not name.

Fear for myself was forgotten. I thought only of Hubert. I panted like a snared animal as I lay hidden in the thicket, my wet palms crushing the branches and leaves as I gripped them and pushed them away in my effort to see what was going on.

The drum began to beat monotonously, the sacred trumpets to yield their sweet, mournful music. The ceremonies had begun. The night blackened yet more, the jungle closed in threateningly about me. The eyes of the jungle spirits were upon me, searching out my shivering, cringing body and mind. I had sealed my own doom. In a few days—the jungle spirits always took a few days to seek vengeance instead of mercifully striking one dead on the spot—they, my people, would find me dead with no marks of violence upon me.

I quieted once more. Well, then, if it must be so, if I was to die so soon anyhow, how better could I spend what little life I had left than in saving Hubert from whatever ghastly fate Kandi had planned for him? Hubert, big, strong, and abounding with the magnetic vitality of eager youth! I knew only too well the things that could, and did, happen undiscovered in the jungle. No one knew better than I!

Once again, stopping every few seconds to listen, I crawled on hands and knees and sometimes on my bare belly, recklessly contemptuous of reptiles and poisonous insects in which the region abounded, to where I could see plainly through the open door of the building.

The deep toned reverberations of the drum rose and fell over me until I felt them like physical blows. In that instant was born my active hatred for the drum. The weird, haunting music of the sacred trumpets rushed at me furiously, accusingly, buffeting me. Then I became incapable of action of any kind, under the strange dominating fascination of the combined forces. I left off thinking, transported into a wild, perverted ecstasy that took away for the time all physical feeling. I was bodyless, conscious only of a savage, sensual revelry of spirit, of a mad exhilaration, a jungle fanaticism.

THEN a glimpse of Hubert's white body among the bronze ones recalled me with a sickening rush and lurch of the heart to my mission.

All the men were dancing, a different kind of dance from the one I had joined. Great draughts of *kaapi* were being handed around and gulped by strong brown throats. Men were lifted out of themselves in its intoxication, returning oftener and oftener to drink again. The drum boomed, the trumpets played, the polished nuts on the ankles of the men clashed like castanets and glistened in occasional flashes of light. All at once Kandi, standing with imperious, military hauteur by the drum, brought his feather-hung bamboo shield high against his great chest and struck his war-lance, which had a shaft forming a rattle, crashing upon the ground.

Instantly the dancers spread out, arranging themselves in a circle. Into their midst walked Hubert and the young men, the candidates. Each was given a drink of *kaapi* to deaden pain; and each was handed a stout staff upon which he leaned according to the medicine man's instructions. Again Kandi struck his war-lance to the ground. Every dancer caught up a hollow gourd filled with nuts, and with the new rattles shaking rhythmically, they sang in a low chant and stamped their feet. The fitful light played fantastically over their glistening, painted bodies. The savage gleam of their black eyes presaged relishful joy in the spectacle of torture bravely borne. And always they shuffled and swayed and rattled their anklets horribly. Then it began.

Kandi picked up a long, snake-like whip and with it began beating brutally and in time to the weird music,

the back of the first boy he came to. The boy appeared not to feel the lash that brought blood to his young back and left angry welts there. He stood firm, the expression on his face showing an uplift of the spirit. I looked at Hubert. He was clearly unaffected by the *kaapi* he had drunk. *And Kandi was counting on this!*

He was looking forward to seeing Hubert suffer unspeakably, to seeing the blood well and spurt down his white body, to shredding his flesh with his fiendish whip which he plied with all the strength of his mighty arm, and loved to do! Hubert was at the other end of the line, his ordeal to be the last, the cream of this night's *jurupari.*

IT CAME Hubert's turn. Kandi stepped to one side, ostensibly to rest a moment before starting his final feat. But to my horror, I saw the medicine man slyly dip the end of the lash into a tiny jar that stood inconspicuously by an empty compartment. An empty, unfurnished compartment! That meant that no one lived there, that no jar therefore had any right to be there, and that Kandi had it ready and waiting for just this one thing.

No one else had seen him.

Across my mind flashed the recollection of a man whom Kandi had hated, and whom he had publicly whipped on a trivial charge. The beating had not been severe, but the man had died with all the earmarks of having been poisoned.

I woke from my trance into a realization of Hubert's terrible and imminent danger. If I was to do anything to save him, it would have to be done now. Already Kandi moved back into the circle of dancing, stamping, chanting men. My heart almost failed me. Life was so sweet. I did not want to die. But was I not doomed anyway? Alas, yes. I had profaned the sacred trumpets with my woman's eyes. Well, then—

Kandi raised his whip, the lash quivering as it sang through the air, its long length whirling overhead as it gathered speed for the first blow.

Springing to my feet from behind the low line of brush where I had been lying, and screaming madly, my nerves having reached the breaking point, I made my presence known.

It was enough. Kandi dropped the whip like a shot, the blow spent in mid-air, and started for the door followed by Hubert and the others. They poured out into the night. Even above the playing of the trumpets and the roar of the drum, they had heard me, had known there was a blasphemous witness in their midst. And however much he might have desired to do so, even Kandi would never have dared ignore that warning in the face of his tribal brothers.

After that I became confused. I made no effort to escape. I only knew that Hubert was striding out to me by Kandi's side; that in the miraculously short time it took the sentinels who reached me first, to drag me to the building, the trumpets had disappeared. And then I knew no more until I woke to find myself lying on the hard floor of the empty compartment before which the jar of Kandi's poison had stood.

The jar was gone now. And who would believe me if I tried to tell them truth of the matter? I lay still a moment, then I found sufficient courage to raise myself on my elbow and look about me.

Men everywhere lay in a heavy, drunken stupor. Even my guards, squatting on their muscled haunches in front of my compartment, were sunk in sleep forced on them by the excessive use of *kaapi,* but I could not hope to steal past them undetected.

My heart filled with a new terror. Did all this mean that after all I was not to be left to the doubtful mercies of the jungle spirits? Had my transgression been greater than I realized? Women were never allowed to look upon torture. And there were no women here!

I sank back again, physically sick. Such terror as I had known before was as nothing at all beside that which paralyzed me now.

It was close upon dawn. The breathless quiet of the jungle told me that. A movement, cautious and noiseless as it was, registered on my supersensitive hearing. Hubert and Kandi,

threading a path through the sleeping men, neared my compartment. Without saying a word Kandi gestured toward me, and as by prearrangement Hubert picked me up in his arms. At the door Kandi paused and allowed Hubert to precede him to the river, himself acting as rear guard, his hard, alert eyes darting here and there to watch against surprise.

We reached the river. My hopes rose. Hubert laid me in his canoe. I understood. With Kandi's connivance he was attempting to rescue me. But why this sudden concession on Kandi's part? It was no kind impulse that prompted him to do this thing. That I knew.

Then Kandi himself came to me, and raising me until my head rested on his broad shoulder, he held an earthen bowl to my lips and tried to force between them the liquid it contained. But I didn't trust him, and I held my lips tight and turned my head away.

"Kaapi," he said urgently.

I stared up into his eyes. They were gleaming with anticipated triumph, and I saw the evil smile on his face, and knew that if this was indeed *kaapi,* it was poisoned. Poison was Kandi's stock in trade.

I fought him desperately in my fresh despair, but so strong was he that my struggles were as futile as those of a child. Hubert did not intervene. He thought Kandi was offering me a stimulant I needed sadly in my exhausted state and that the medicine man naturally could handle me much better than he could. But I understood. If Kandi could not have me himself, he meant to see to it that no other man should possess me. If Kandi had known that I had looked upon the trumpets, he would not have troubled about poisoning me.

At this point that damnable drum again started up its throbbing. It seemed to be in a deadly humor. My hatred for it burst into a hellish rage. To me the drum was hideous, malevolent, thirsting for Hubert's blood. And mine.

Someone had wakened and found us gone—that was the explanation of the drum. The cunning Kandi might have arranged that, too. Soon the whole river would be alive with pursuing canoes. If Hubert were caught with me, dead or alive, he would be taken back and made to die a thousand deaths. Kandi expected Hubert to be caught. It was, no doubt, at Kandi's oily-tongued suggestion that Hubert, with the gay, adventurous spirit of youth running riot within him, had agreed to save a girl from death.

Now it was up to me. If we left at once, we might have a chance to escape. But in order to make Kandi let us go, I must drink the potion he had prepared for me. Well, it would give Hubert his chance, and for me, perhaps, be the kinder death. Numbly I closed my eyes and drank. Hubert knelt in the canoe, paddle in hand. We were moving.

THE poisoned *kaapi* made my head whirl, and the dark closed down. With great effort I raised my heavy eyelids for a last longing look at the world I loved.

A blur of light from somewhere hurt my eyes but cleared my head a bit. Had the villagers caught up with us already, torches in hand? Then my sight focused.

Dazzled by the light from a shaded lamp a few feet away, I found I was lying on the davenport directly opposite the sacred trumpets in the library that were still brazenly displayed to public view. Hubert was standing at my feet, bending toward me as he had been in the canoe. Only, of course, he had no paddle in his hand.

A man with a short gray beard and wise, kind eyes behind spectacles was holding me in one arm, my head raised against his shoulder, while he forced black coffee from a cup into my mouth. I knew without being told that this was a medicine man of our civilized world, a doctor. On the table were the empty glass bottle and the earthen bowl, mutely telling an eloquent story to those who had eyes to see.

Later, when the doctor was gone and I was feeling quite myself again except for a splitting headache that Hubert laughingly called my hang-

over, I went through the whole nightmare with him, feeling that I would never dare go to sleep until I had done so. Hubert sat on the side of my bed, holding my hand, and listening gravely.

"It's all nonsense, of course," he said reassuringly, but he was disturbed all the same. "But I wish I had put those trumpets away. They bring bad luck wherever they are. And they bring disagreeable memories, too.

"You see, everything you have told me, insofar as it comes within my personal knowledge and experience, even to Kandi, the medicine man, happened to me just twenty years ago this very day. I have no knowledge of the Indian girl, other than that she was watching the *jurupari* rites, and that it was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that she had seen the sacred trumpets. These same ones in that cabinet yonder, as a matter of fact. She died before we got to the next village. I always suspected that the medicine man, rather than the jungle spirits, hastened her death. Possibly with the *kaapi*."

HE looked down at me broodingly from under his half closed lids, and smiled.

"You are taking this too seriously, dear. What really happened this evening is that, although drugged and apparently dead to the world, you were mentally receptive. Your subconscious mind registered so vividly the description I gave the doctor as he worked over you after I found the empty *kaapi* bottle, that you thought you lived the story."

But I shook my head and said slowly:

"That doesn't explain everything, Hubert, by any manner of means. You don't know a thing about why or how she risked her life in order to watch the *jurupari* rites, do you? Well, I do! I can feel every phase of it, right now. And if we were back along the Amazon, I could lead you directly to the community house, and out along the route we took in the jungle when we heard the sound of the sacred trumpets!"

I could not repress a shudder, and the palms of my hands were cold and wet with remembered fear.

"I was born on the night the Indian girl died, perhaps at the very hour," I whispered. "If there is such a thing as the transference of a soul to another body—of course you couldn't marry an Indian girl. But it may well be that it was meant for her, and me, to have your love after all."

Hubert laughed, reaching up to tug at my hair.

"And Indian girl, with fine, yellow curls? I'm afraid I lean to the doctor's opinion that you were drunk on *kaapi*."

But Hubert himself had said that *kaapi* did not affect white men and women. And the fact remains that to this day I sometimes have an almost uncontrollable desire for it.

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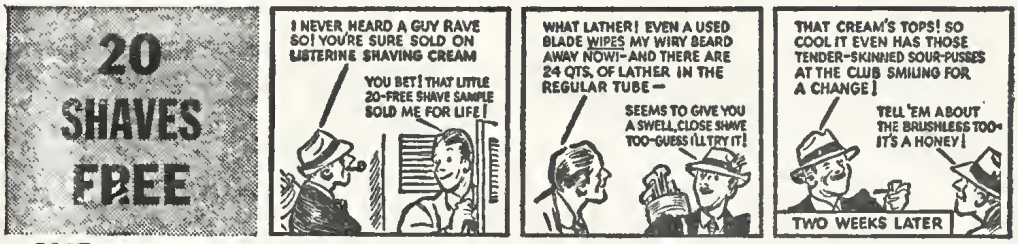

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LET ME OUT!

By MARIA MORAVSKY

Author of "The Great Release," "The Castle of Tamara," etc.

DO YOU believe in the supernatural, Doc? I didn't think you would. . . . Yet there are things. . . . Let me tell you what caused my nervous breakdown, and see what you think of it. Yes, I know you were told in a general way, but without the details. . . . It's those tangled details that got me, I think. Being unable to straighten things out. . . .

To be fresh from college, in these troubled years, is no joke. I had a hard time finding that job as a helper in the Peaceful Rest funeral home.

Well, right after the first pay day, they entrusted to me a well embalmed corpse, to be sent by express to Jacksonville, for cremation. A middle-aged man who had spent most of his life in a cashier's cage of the First National, and had hated it, hated every minute of it. They say that this hatred of being confined went with him to the grave. . . . Figuratively speaking, of course, since he was to be cremated.

Well, on that trip along the windy coast, I sat in the car adjoining the baggage car. Across from me, there sat a baldish, florid-faced fellow. An amiable stranger.

We started a conversation. He seemed to be dreadfully bored. They say this is the state of mind when we

An Imprisoned Mind is More Hopelessly Doomed Than an Imprisoned Body!

An unearthly scream emanated from the coffin

are terribly receptive to other people's ideas, dead or alive, hovering about us. . . .

You don't believe in a living man being a subconscious mouthpiece for the recently dead? No, I didn't think you would. But I have my doubts. . . . You see, that one in the adjoining car bothered me a bit. Oh, sure, he must have been quite dead—embalmed.

"I have a charge in the baggage car, too," my companion said, with a somewhat impish grin. "A parrot. I'm in the show business, you know. My parrot and I are going to Jacksonville to perform in a vaudeville act. It's quite a special parrot. Like to see him?"

I had always been fond of animals. As a boy I dragged home all sorts of stray cats and dogs, much to my parent's annoyance.

"I haven't got a cracker," I said jokingly, "but I'll take a look at him."

"First have a drink with me," the amiable stranger offered.

IT WAS good cognac, old Hennessy. It warmed my heart. I felt quite cheerful when we walked into the baggage car, and my mind was far from morbid imaginings. But suddenly I was chilled with fear. I seemed to hear a sound of fists banging against wood, and a hoarse voice crying:

"Let me out! Let me out!"

My companion looked at me with suppressed excitement. I wondered if he heard the same thing. . . .

With shaking finger, I pointed to the coffin.

"He wants to get out," the showman said with a queer smile.

Well, God in heaven, so did I, and I would have run blindly out of the car if my new-found companion, wearing that impish grin of his again, had not pointed to the cage that had hitherto escaped my notice and said:

"Don't be silly. It's Oscar, my parrot."

I was suddenly angry, with that characteristic anger that succeeds a fright caused by a hoax.

"Why the devil didn't you tell me that!" I demanded.

"Anything for a joke," he said placatingly. "I was bored—"

"Fine way to amuse yourself—frightening people?"

"Forgive me," he implored again. "I'm addicted to practical jokes, but I mean no harm. Let's have another drink."

I was so disgusted, I wouldn't even look at his bird which had scared me so. Out we went, to commune again with the good old Hennessy. It was so mellow, I almost forgave the man his practical joke.

"This trip drives me crazy. I hate trains. Nothing bores me more," my companion complained again. "Let's take Oscar out of his cage and bring him here. He needs to stretch his wings after being cooped up here for so long."

Oscar was a handsome bird, an Amazonian parrot with blue forehead and emerald wings tipped with scarlet on the shoulders. It could talk a blue streak. After amusing ourselves with it for a while I suddenly remembered that I had left my pipe in the baggage car.

"I think I'll go with you. You look somewhat unstrung," my companion said sympathetically.

I was really grateful to him. I was somewhat scared of stiffs, even after a week of their company. Nervously I started to look for my pipe in the dimly lit car and found it lying on the edge of the coffin. Just as I was stretching my hand toward it, I heard the hoarse voice again:

"Let me out! Let me out!"

I knocked the pipe off the coffin. My companion looked at me with lips tightly compressed.

"Your damned bird!" I started to flare—

"Oscar is in the next car," he said. "You couldn't hear him from here!" He looked at me, his eyes gleaming impishly. And again, muffled by the wood, there came the cry from the coffin:

"Let me out!"

Beads of perspiration stood on my forehead. I could feel them. I took out my handkerchief and wiped my face.

"Do you—do you hear it, too?"

HIS face worked strangely. I thought that he was about to cry.

"I knew it from the first," he said solemnly, controlling his emotions at last. "I said it was the parrot, because I didn't want you to lose your nerve. You're young, and it's your first job, and I sympathize with you. Let's get out of here and have another drink."

I walked out, shaking all over. I was grateful to the stranger for his consideration. The bottle of good old cognac was almost empty when he suddenly slapped his thigh, burst into laughter and handed me his card.

He was a ventriloquist.

I wanted to sock him in the jaw, but restrained myself. After all, I had played the fool. I had had no business to get frightened—me six feet tall, weighing two hundred pounds, a college graduate, an amateur wrestling champion. It was ridiculous to carry on like a superstitious old maid.

We finished the bottle amiably enough. I was rather light-headed when the time came to take my charge to the crematory. My companion felt somewhat better, his feet were more steady.

"You know, I do feel guilty. . . . We'll check the parrot with the station master, and I'll drive with you to the incinerator where they burn the stiffs," he offered.

"Fine!" Unsteadily, I wrung his hand.

I dimly remember driving to the huge, ornate building with the queer electric furnace. My head must have been pretty clouded. I don't recall any conversation between myself and the crematorium attendants—my companion must have taken care of all the details. I just remember a great burst of blue flame, and the goose pimples rising on my flesh when I heard once more:

"Let me out! Let me out!"

I looked at the ventriloquist. Here he was again, with his sacrilegous, impudent jokes! I lifted my hand to strike him. But it stopped in mid-air. I saw his face, florid before, now deathly pale. He was as shaky as I.

"I swear I didn't do it this time," he whispered. And I knew he was telling the truth. My heart nearly choked me.

The crematorium attendant, his face a whitish blur, seemed suddenly bereft of all flesh, and stood exposed to the bones, a grinning skeleton, as if seen by some second sight, more powerful than any X-ray.

Molten metal seemed to flow through my veins. I was being drawn irresistibly to the furnace from which there issued for the last time the dreadful cry of the dead cashier. How often in life his spirit must have voiced that same cry— And now—

"Let me out!"

Now, Doc, you've treated me awfully well here. I'd like to be discharged now. But I'd be much obliged if you would tell me before I go what caused my nervous breakdown. Was I drunk then, at the crematorium, or was it another of my pal's ghoulish jokes? What, you're not going to discharge me! Do I have to stay here? Let me out, let me out. . . .

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THE MASTER

By SHELTON GOODALL

Author of "Heritage," "Too Much Ghost," etc.

CHAPTER I

The Great Malvolio

EVERYTHING was so right, so true to the old pattern, that it was all wrong. The circus was in town again. There was the four of us newshounds hunched around a table at the High Spot. Our stories about the pitching the big top had been put to bed along with the rest of tomorrow morning's news, as dead now as an old number-plate.

Everything was as routine as the stories themselves, which ran year after year in the same groove, with now and then a fresh angle or a juicy novelty like the Tight-rope-Walking Dog, or the Original Whirling Dervish, or the Amphibious Lady, or—or Malvolio. Funny how I can't get him out of my mind. But we didn't mention him. We just swapped the same old gripes about the show, and—well, everything was the same, I tell you—the time, the place, the season, the group, the talk—and then Martin came walking in at the door.

But that's what made it all wrong.

For Martin wasn't with the circus any more. He was washed up, broken. Since the horror of a year ago, he hadn't been able to turn out a line of publicity copy. He'd walked out from under the big top that night and disappeared. After a week, they got another press agent. The only news we had of Martin was at second- or third-hand, relayed from New Orleans, Taos, Mérida. And what we heard indicated that he was marked for loneliness, would never again transform sour, leaden hours around a scarred table into a harlequin carnival punctuated by the Roman candles of his fancy, would certainly never again walk through that particular doorway.

It was just as if you saw a man who'd been killed in a crash a year ago, driving the very car which had been demolished with him, along the same fatal stretch of road. You'd feel a cold breath whisk across the nape of your neck, all right. I know I did.

There is a Terrible, Uncanny Secret About Malvolio, the Animal Hypnotist, a Grim Secret That Makes Men's Blood Go Cold!

LOWRY, sitting on my right, saw him first. Lowry set down his glass, and the beer slopped over on the table. He muttered:

"Jupiter! The joint's haunted."

Travers began irritably, "What's the mat—" Then he followed Lowry's fascinated stare. He never finished the sentence.

The only one of us who didn't regret his last two beers was Daly, slouching with his back to the door. He took a deep pull at his glass and grunted at us, over the rim:

"Who is it? Carrie Nation?"

"It's Martin," I told him.

His porcine face crinkled under the shock, then became smoothly phlegmatic again. You could depend on Daly. The *Courier* had been doing it for twenty years.

"Well, ask him over," he said. "I take it he's alive, so don't look like watchers at a wake. 'Tain't sociable."

With one foot he snared a chair and drew it up to the table.

It was the only time I have seen

Something passed between him and the beast

A Complete Novelet

Lowry embarrassed. He peered down at his glass, and I saw a dim flush creeping up from the angle of his jaw, where a muscle was throbbing angrily.

"You can't do that," he muttered.

"Maybe *you* can't." Daly was quite genial. "But I've got a few questions I want to ask him. If you want to give me the beat on it, okay."

"Wait a sec!" cut in Travers nervously. "You'll scuttle our chances! I want the dope as much as you do. But I've got sense enough to know he won't open up to us. Let Spruce handle him. Spruce knew Martin better than we did. He was there that night. Martin'll talk to him."

My name isn't Spruce. It's Pine. But they always called me Spruce, and I'd given up trying to find out why.

I wanted to see Martin. I wanted him to talk to me. But not for the *Bulletin*. For my own peace of mind —and Martin's. And off the record.

I didn't know what to say. I sat there miserably, looking down the length of the smoke-filled room at Martin, until the table, and those around it, faded out of my vision, and Martin and I were facing each other under the big top, on that last night, with the smell of peanuts and sawdust and semi-tamed animal flesh in our nostrils.

Martin saw me. He came slowly toward the table, and I think I stood up. He seemed thinner, older, and under a leathery tan his features had a queer look of the beyond about them.

"Hello, Spruce," he said.

His voice had the same breathless, comalike quality which it had held that night after the inexplicable had happened. When he spoke, it was as though not only the table and my companions were wiped away, but even the High Spot, the downtown district —yes, even time itself. Into their place came crowding the past with its cargo of heady and terrifying strangeness. . . .

* * * * *

MARTIN was waiting for me at the main entrance to the big top when I arrived about fifteen minutes late for our appointment. We were having what the easterners would call an Indian summer that fall, and the morning haze was burning off fast. I wiped the sweat off my forehead and said I hoped it was cooler inside.

"Yeah, like a Turkish bath," rejoined Martin, grinning, as we walked into the main tent. "Well, we'll get this over and then duck out and soak up some beer. What say?"

"I thought you might be on the pink lemonade wagon" I chuckled. "You're looking pretty fit. What you been doing? Having transfusions?"

When I'd last seen him, the season before, he'd just got over an attack of dysentary, and he'd looked like something in the final stages.

"Had a good year," he explained.

We were walking past the cages, and I commented on a pair of black panthers that were new. He nodded, enthusiastically.

"Swell show, all around. Some deadbeats cleared off, a few chronic troublemakers told good-by and good luck, and one real knockout sensation added, that's done it."

The lilt in his voice, the jauntiness in his step, and the glint in his eyes that had not been there before made me believe that this season he had really found the El Dorado of his hopes — the super-colossal sensation that would drag 'em in by the hair.

"Yeah. I've been reading the posters," I said, baiting him. "But if you've hauled me over here to interview the Iron-jawed Maidens—"

"Sensation, I said!" he retorted, his gray eyes giving me the equivalent of a Bronx cheer. He had paused by a group of small cages. Now he turned away from me and said, with ill-repressed excitement: "And there he is. Spruce, meet the Great Malvolio."

I followed his gesture and saw a ridiculously small, nondescript figure drooping against the tiers of cages. To say that I wasn't impressed would be to convey only a fraction of my disappointment. And as Martin led the way toward the man, nothing developed to correct this initial reaction.

When he saw us approaching, the man eased himself erect. Even so, he hardly measured five feet in height,

and a more unkempt, unprepossessing five feet I've never seen. He was wearing a Kelly-green uniform with brass buttons and tight gold collar. Atop his matted, greasy curls perched a satin kepi of the same shade of green, with a gold cockade plunk in the center.

These resplendent trappings only emphasized his complete nonentity. He had a coarse, sallow, pugnacious face with a slyly brutal mouth and a broad-tipped, recessive nose. The only expression in his otherwise vapid amber eyes was one of latent truculence.

He didn't look like the Great anything. To tell you the truth, I thought Martin was kidding, trying to get a rise out of us.

"The animal hypnotist?" I asked, incredulously. He didn't look capable of hypnotizing a flea, let alone a group of animals.

By way of answer, Martin rattled off to Malvolio, in fluent French, that I had come from the *Bulletin* to interview him, and that I had inquired if he was, indeed, the incomparable hypnotist of animals.

"*Bien entendu. Et puis?*" slurred Malvolio insolently.

Martin turned to me delightedly and translated:

"He says he has that modest honor, and welcomes you."

BUT that wasn't what Malvolio had said. "Of course. So what?" was the gist of it. And it was unlike Martin not to have given me an accurate translation, with a laugh at my expense thrown in for good measure. But I gave no sign that I had understood both question and answer. Instead, I asked Martin if Malvolio was French.

"No, no," he said, quickly. He's—well, I understand he's Italian. At least, his father—"

"Nuts!" I said. "I know French when I hear it, even if I don't understand it."

"Well, he's always lived in France. In circuses. His father was an animal tamer. He's gone one step further. Here, take a look at the animals he hypnotizes in the show."

CHAPTER II

Bimbo the Monkey

I NOTED a scrubby terrier, a white cat, a fox, a hen, a mountain lion, and others which I have now forgotten. Just as I was bending down to peer into the bottom tier of cages, Malvolio sidled forward and plucked at Martin's sleeve.

"Tell him that next season I shall have a monkey!" he hissed urgently, in French. "A monkey, mark you! It will be a triumph! A veritable triumph!"

He kept repeating "*Triomphe!*" in a sort of frenzy while Martin remarked casually to me:

"Next season, he might hypnotize a monkey."

So, once again, Martin had interposed the screen of a carefully adulterated translation between me and Malvolio. I was disturbed, and a bit angry. I decided on a final test, to make sure that I wasn't imagining an odd situation where none existed.

"Ask him if he can show me how he hypnotizes the animals," I said to Martin.

Malvolio's immediate response to this question, put to him in his native tongue, was a calculating leer.

"*Pour ça, il faut payer,*" was his ultimatum.

I was already bridling at this bald statement that if I wanted a story I could plank down the cash, when Martin interpreted it.

"He says he prefers not to bother the animals now, if that is all right with you. Why don't you stay for the show, Spruce?"

That settled it. I took one last look at the malevolent amber eyes under the green kepi and swung on my heel to leave.

"Okay," I grunted. "You might put me as near the ring as you can. I don't mind telling you, though, that he's got a lot of ground to make up before I give him an inch of space."

"He's quite different in the ring," Martin replied, eagerly. "You can't

get much this way—with the language difficulty, and so on."

"Maybe," I said. "You're sure he's Italian?"

"What else?"

"I don't know. He doesn't look like any kind of stock I've ever seen. There's something I can't put my finger on, some—"

Martin stiffened. I felt the entering wedge of a barrier thrust between us.

"You mustn't be prejudiced by his manner and appearance," he objected. "He's a lonely, sad man. Been through a lot. When you know him better, you'll want to pat him on the head and tell him it's going to be all right."

So that was it. Martin had fallen under the influence of Malvolio, to such an extent that he felt impelled to protect the hypnotist from dispassionate probing. I didn't like it. But what could I do?"

"He certainly got all worked up over that monkey," I said.

MARTIN'S glance was sharp, wary. Then he shrugged. "It seems to mean a lot to him. You see, he originally wanted to be a hypnotist of human beings. But evidently he didn't have what it takes. So he turned to animals. He's sort of working his way up the scale, proving his powers at every step. I guess he reckons that if he can hypnotize a monkey—well, Darwin would say he's on the right track. But that's strictly off the record." He gripped my arm. "Understand?"

I caught the show that afternoon. As a result, I had to revise my opinion of Malvolio's talents. But my opinion of his personality was only strengthened by seeing him in action. Perhaps I shouldn't call it an opinion. It wasn't that definite. Let's just say a feeling of antipathy, of suspicion. And of something like uneasiness, only deeper, more elemental. Looking back, I realize that it was the first throb of the pulse of fear.

In bringing the animals under his control, Malvolio used none of the wild gestures which we usually associate with hypnotists. He simply walked up to the subject, his head thrust forward, his jaw jutting out ruthlessly. Then he seemed to capture the subject's eyes with a look which I couldn't see from where I was sitting, brush his hand across the creature's line of vision—and a moment later the control was complete.

The actual mechanics were as simple as that, but when he gave those animals the business, they never knew what hit them.

He had something, all right. But I didn't care for the way he put it across. There was something peculiar and unwholesome in his attitude toward the animals, something brutish and uncouth in his every pose, gesture, command. And the animals, in turn, reacted like no other circus animals that I had ever seen.

Malvolio's presence seemed to keep them suspended in a state of eerie panic. It was as though they were in the grip of a nameless horror unfamiliar to them in this world, as though they were confronted not by a man, but by some strange demon.

I'd seen deer and foxes behave that way when a brush fire was herding them down a canyon. Something fearful had been loosed among these animals. Something had invaded that ring which bore no relation to the ordinary, sane world—or even to the tinsel world of the circus. And Malvolio's subjects knew the color of its spots.

Among them there was one powerful enough to strike back at it. Malvolio knew it, too. Perhaps I'd better tell you about that.

At one point in the proceedings, the ringmaster asked people to step right down and see for themselves. Naturally, I trooped over to the ring, along with quite a few others. We gathered around the arena, and the first thing we knew an attendant had released the mountain lion.

The beast came prowling out, scenting flesh and knowing damn well that no bars were holding him back any longer from his prey. He slunk back and forth, muscles rippling under the lustrous hide, tail lashing, fangs bared. But suddenly I realized that those fangs were bared, not at us, but at Malvolio. And the eyes were express-

ing something quite different from either the dramatic cooperation, the resentment, or the hatred which you find in circus lions, according to variations in temperament of the lions or their tamers.

It was a fearless, skulking, potentially victorious attitude, which jerked me back into the jungle. I tell you the lion ignored us as prey; his green gaze never flickered from Malvolio's face. And those lambent eyes seemed to say it was only a question of time, a question of time, and he didn't like waiting.

THE people around me didn't notice the lion's concentration of attention. Those in front were beginning to step on the toes of those crowding behind when Malvolio picked up a revolver and an iron-pronged pole and strode up to the lion. Something passed between him and the beast. Unwillingly—but inevitably, the lion subsided, became passive.

Then Malvolio invited us to come up to the animal and do what we liked with him. Three or four of us finally approached the crouching beast, who awaited us dully and without comprehension. I patted his head; another man lifted up his paw; one even tweaked his tail. That lion might just as well have been under ether.

At last, Malvolio led the beast back to his cage, locked him in. This done, he snapped his fingers once, close to the glazed eyes. And the lion emerged from his trance. He gathered his muscles, flung his magnificent, fawn-colored length at the bars, and threatened his master with a coughing snarl that set my scalp prickling.

It had a strange effect on Malvolio. Though the lion was behind bars, and he himself the cynosure of many thousand eyes, Malvolio flinched and shuddered. For a moment he was lost; his face, when he turned around, was pale and numb; and in his eyes was a baffled, groping, hunted look to which the lion's howl of rage and triumph deferred, was a primitive accompaniment.

Yes, looking back I can see that the animals, being closer to the thing in more senses than one, guessed the nature of Malvolio's secret. I wish I had guessed it then, for both Martin's sake and mine. But I didn't. I was conscious only of the uneasiness which I now know was really fear as I turned and went back to my seat.

Malvolio's act had given me a good story. But that other story, the shadow-play that kept evading the arc-lights, taunted me. It worried me a bit, too, on account of Martin. I even wondered, sometimes, during the following year, if Malvolio's eyes, opaque, amber pools to the average observer, had not loosed upon Martin the unearthly light which those unhappy creatures must have beheld in the final instant before their entities yielded to their master's.

Martin's occasional letters gave me no clue. When I found him haggard and jumpy, the next season, I was ready to trot out the fruits of a year's brooding, but he suddenly volunteered an explanation. The monkey.

Malvolio had kept his promise. He had added a Java monkey and discarded the mountain lion. Martin explained that the lion had finally become so dangerous that Malvolio had found it necessary to hypnotize the beast before releasing it from the cage. Naturally, audiences had gradually refused to believe that it was savage at all. In the lion's place, the monkey had proved to be sometimes a sensation of equal value, sometimes a dismal, even humiliating flop.

The Java monkey, dangerous, sullen, and crafty, is difficult to handle. He has little of the affection of the marmoset, the ready mimicry of the capuchin, or the beguiling mischievousness of the spider monkey. But in the dark, haunted quality of his mind, he is closer to the man than any of these.

And out of the dark, haunted chambers of his own mind, Malvolio had gathered the resolution to hypnotize a Java monkey, and no other.

The results were not happy. At times, Malvolio could do anything he liked with the monkey. And then,

just as things were running smoothly and Malvolio and Martin were sleeping regularly again, the monkey would do something unpredictable.

CHAPTER III

Next, the Orang-Outang

"WHAT could a monkey do against a man who can hypnotize a lion?" I asked Martin curiously.

"Plenty!" he exploded. "Sometimes Bimbo won't look at him—just cradles his head in his arms, or claps his paws over his face—and Malvolio has to wrench them away and jerk his chin up to catch his eye. The audiences go crazy. They roar and stamp and whistle, and cheer for the monkey. One night in Cleveland he ran up the ladder to the high wire, and we practically had to call off the rest of the show."

His harassed eyes dared me to laugh. But I didn't feel like laughing.

"How does Malvolio take it?" I wanted to know.

"Well, how would you take it? Go out and drown your humiliation, wouldn't you? Malvolio's only human. I wish he'd scrap the monkey, but it seems to mean a lot to him, you see. The hell of it is, the other animals seem to have got wind of it, and it makes them—difficult."

I could see that, when I watched the act that night. Malvolio kept their restlessness well in hand; but the methods he employed sent little flickers of rage along my veins. I didn't enjoy the way he hauled the fox out of its cage by the scruff of the neck and tossed it, cringing, to the sawdust; the way he booted the terrier back into confinement because it bared its teeth at him. And the string of buttural, crudely mouthed sounds with which he pounced on the cat at the close of the finale fairly poured ice water down my spine.

The cat had climbed on the hen's back, and when Malvolio came to pick it up after he had released it from the spell, it arched its back and spat at him. What he said to it bore no resemblance to French. Indeed, it seemed hardly human. But the cat understood it, for she screeched—a thin, eldritch wail that unnerved me completely.

While the monkey behaved fairly well, it was as though he had taken a notion to humor Malvolio. Maybe I was oversensitive, after what had gone before. But in Bimbo's antics before Malvolio hypnotized him, I seemed to read the workings of a sardonic fancy. For Bimbo leaped to Malvolio's shoulder, nibbled at Malvolio's ear, combed imaginary wild life out of Malvolio's hair, and stroked Malvolio's shoulder commiseratingly. None of these actions were part of Bimbo's turn, I was sure, for Malvolio cuffed the mocking creature to the ground and eyed him into helplessness, then and there.

When Bimbo snapped out of it, he behaved even more strangely. First he put his head between his paws and rocked from side to side. Then, stretching his neck, he peered up into Malvolio's face as if his sultry, close-set eyes held some message which he would communicate to his master. And then he laughed. To the audience, it undoubtedly looked like gibbering, but to the initiate, a monkey's laughter is unmistakable.

Malvolio picked him up, roughly, and I was near enough to see how his fingers closed around Bimbo's throat, convulsively, as though tempted past endurance, while with his free hand he pretended to caress the creature. Somehow, it made me want to get up, walk straight into the ring, and knock him down.

I think it was in that moment that I realized that Bimbo had probed Malvolio's secret to its nether depths. How a monkey had managed to fathom the mind of a man, I didn't know. But I didn't question the fact. And it made me fear for Bimbo's safety. His peril was threefold. He knew Malvolio's secret. He had the power to put his knowledge into action.

And, worst of all, Malvolio did not share his knowledge!

I READ that disturbing truth in Malvolio's bewildered face, in his aimless gestures, in the frustrated shake of his head as he slammed the door of Bimbo's cage. But I'm afraid I was far from pitying Malvolio then. I only pitied, with a pity akin to wrath, the creatures in his power, banded together in a primitive awareness of evil and punished by him, accordingly, with an inhumanity which I know now was caused by the greatest of terrors—that of the unknown.

I never liked Malvolio. And I know that Malvolio disliked and mistrusted me, too. He always kept between me and the cages, head down, avoiding my eyes. Twice he ordered Martin to make me go away and stay away.

"We're making the animals a bit nervous," was Martin's version. He still persisted in protecting Malvolio, you see. That alarmed me more deeply than anything else. He didn't seem to realize that he was fooling around with something that had dreadful potentialities. And I—God help me—I didn't know what to warn him about!

I don't blame Malvolio now. For hating me, I mean. When I turned my back I could feel the amber eyes upon me, smoldering with the desire to visit upon me the powers that quelled dog and cat and monkey. That was natural. He believed that I, like Bimbo, had plumbed the very depths of his being and fished up some terrible and tragic knowledge which he himself did not possess, and which I might at any moment communicate to Martin.

As Malvolio grew steadily more shabby, more unkempt, more alcoholic, more brutal in his treatment of the animals, he became more obsessed with his progress toward the goal which Martin had outlined to me. So I guess I was more or less expecting Martin's summons, last season. I wasn't very much surprised when he told me that Malvolio had brought the sensation of all sensations to the circus. That Bimbo was no more. Something had —happened to him. That, in his place, Malvolio was hypnotizing an orang-outang.

Swell copy, but a terrific undertaking, I thought. The first thing I wanted was a look at the ape.

"He isn't giving any trouble," Martin assured me, as we tramped over the sawdust toward Malvolio's old stand. "You'll find him quite docile and intelligent. Nothing like Bimbo. Bimbo could mimic, when he wanted to. This fellow seems to learn, if you get what I mean."

"Full-grown?"

"Oh, yes."

"Funny. I thought orang-outangs were pretty savage."

Martin smiled. "This one's been tame since he was a baby. An old beachcomber on the Sumatran coast caught him and made a pet of him. Malvolio picked him up for a song when he was scouting for new subjects last winter."

We reached the orang-outang's cage and there, leaning against it, was Malvolio. To my amazement, an eager and somehow pathetic expression flared up in his eyes when he spotted me, instead of the old look of suspicion and hatred.

"Tiens, Monsieur Spruce!" he chattered, heaving himself up and forward. *"Soyez le bienvenu! Voici mon trésor que j'ai—"*

"He's delighted to see you!" chimed in Martin, on the same fervent note. The resemblance of tone startled me. I saw, too, that there was something hectic about their enthusiasm. They were both on the defensive, in some unaccountable fashion, and were sweeping away their own misgivings in trying to forestall mine. To conceal my discomfort, I turned to the ape.

HE HAD shuffled forward to the bars and stood regarding me tranquilly—almost courteously—with an extreme gentleness of mien that I found remarkable in one of his kind. His eyes were, as Martin had said, intelligent, almost thoughtful. I can still remember the grave expression which they held, quite different from the puzzled *weltschmerz* which you can see in the eyes of any monkey. Without thinking twice, I put out my hand to him.

For a moment, he hesitated. Then

his long arm came up, and he took my hand in his, gazing at me all the while as if we were meeting in a drawing room, not under canvas with bars between us. He was tall for an orang-outang, almost as tall as Malvolio. I was impressed by him as a specimen and, if it doesn't sound too outlandish, as a personality. I said as much to Martin, and Malvolio evidently grasped the fact that I was impressed, because he nodded and exclaimed:

"Et croire que je suis son maître!"

"Malvolio says he hopes you'll give the ape a good play in the paper," Martin translated.

And that was where I threw in my hand. I didn't see any sense in carrying on the farce any longer. I faced Martin squarely and said coldly and deliberately:

"Really? I thought he said, 'And to think that I am his master!'"

Martin went white about the lips; for a moment I thought he was going to swing at me.

"You twister!" he hissed. "You've understood all along, you—"

"Oh, sure, I'm twisted," I returned bitterly. "You've played so straight with me it hurts me to think about it!"

I walked away from him, so furious that I could hardly see where I was going. But I didn't get far. He caught up with me, took my arm, and swung me around.

"I'm sorry Spruce," he mumbled. "Lost my temper for a minute. You see, I've been trying so damn hard to shield Malvolio from any misunderstanding—"

"I realize that," I told him. "But why? He seems pretty bad medicine to me. Maybe I shouldn't put my oar in, but I think you're getting tangled up with something that's going to explode and rip you to pieces, some day. My God, Martin, you have to live with Malvolio the year round—don't tell me you can't feel uncanny forces moving in and around him, some malignant horror working down deep—"

He made a negative gesture.

"I feel something strange about him, yes. What it is, I don't know. All I know is that it makes him, not terrible, but pitiable, to me."

CHAPTER IV

Final Hypnosis

I COULDN'T voice the fears I felt for him at that moment. I saw him being sucked, by his sympathy, into the vortex of some unspeakable tragedy to come. But I couldn't say anything; it would do no good—might only goad him into involving himself more deeply. I changed the subject.

"What's happened to him, anyway?" I demanded. "He doesn't seem like himself at all—this jumping to greet me, this pathetic, uncertain eagerness to convince himself and me that he's still tops."

"He's been drinking too much—far too much. The ape's all right. But more and more frequently Malvolio seems to lose touch, to forget what he's in the ring for. He leaves the subject, wanders aimlessly and dejectedly around the arena. Just the other night, after he'd hypnotized the orang-outang, instead of giving him the usual command to juggle four balls, Malvolio picked up the balls and started to juggle them himself. It's the liquor, of course. What else could it be?"

"I don't know," I answered slowly. "But I don't want any part of it. And I'd feel better if you kicked Malvolio and his act out of the show. Substitute something else."

With that, I left him, and came back to the big top that night in the grip of the greatest fit of jitters I had ever known. I didn't watch the show at all. I simply waited for Malvolio's act. Finally it came, and the familiar rigmarole of dog, cat, fox, hen, and so on came and went like figures in a Disney cartoon.

Then, to a sinister roll on the drums, he led out the ape.

It is hard for me now to speak of that nightmare. I've spent so many hours trying to purge it from my mind. But it hasn't been purged. It

will go with me into the grave, into the beyond.

I can't remember the beginning. I remember only the moment when Malvolio faced the ape, bent his gaze upon those questing, thoughtful eyes. I can feel the suspense that spread its net for the thousands around me slowly tightening as the moments passed. And I can feel again the vague horror that suddenly gripped my nerves, the warning that something had gone wrong, communicated to the most primeval of the senses. I wanted to cry out — in fact, I thought I did scream aloud.

Then it happened.

It happened very quietly. Slowly, before my terrified eyes, the ape drew himself up to his full height. From those wise, compelling eyes gleamed a look such as I had imagined Malvolio must project when subduing his creatures. Manhood itself seemed to flash forth from the ape, eloquent in his very attitude. He towered over Malvolio.

And Malvolio shrank. Before the ape's commanding gaze, he wilted, shriveled slowly into a crouching position, his arms swinging loosely within an inch of the sawdust. His hunched shoulders, his profile, with the protruding jaw and blunt, bridgeless nose —his very personality—had become apelike.

Then the orang-outang reached down and grasped Malvolio's hand. And the two passed together out of the ring, the ape walking proudly erect, the hypnotist rolling along beside him in the squatting posture common to apes. The audience burst into a riot of hysterical applause.

I was on my feet, sweating and quaking, plunging toward the exit, hunting for Martin. At last I found him stumbling away from a phone.

"Spruce—" he said.

All around us was madness. Lions, tigers, panthers were howling; elephants trumpeted. The jungle knew, and told us what it thought. We stared into each other's eyes, frantic, hagridden, like two monkeys in the dark. Where were the words to compass our thoughts? The universe had cracked under our feet. But I saw reflected in his eyes the turmoil seething and whirling within my vitals.

* * * * *

AND I saw it all again tonight as the mists cleared away. I heard Martin saying across the table, to Travers:

"I don't know why I came. Just to say hello, I guess. I happened to be here, and the show was here, and I thought you'd all be here, so—"

"Whatever became of Malvolio?" asked Daly.

Martin jerked around, then steadied himself.

"He's still at Camarillo," he said.

Travers chuckled. "Still under the impression he's an ape, huh?"

"Too bad about the ape," grunted Daly. "If he hadn't walked down the street and put his arm around that girl's waist, he might still be alive and earning a living. Well, you never know. How do you figure it, Martin? Was the ape on the top limb of evolution, ready to emerge into a man, and—"

"Nuts!" broke in Travers. "The thing's plain enough. Malvolio sent his own entity, or whatever you want to call it, into the ape, and the ape simply took it and bounced his own back into Malvolio. After all, if you're going to fool around with hypnotism, there're bound to be casualties."

Lowry said he didn't think it was anything so supernatural or alarming. Coming from Lowry, this surprised me, and I glanced at him sharply. Then I saw that he was lying. Making light of the thing for Martin's sake.

"Apes are, above everything else, imitative," he declared. "And this was one mighty smart ape. As I see it, he watched and studied what Malvolio did, particularly with the other animals, and then resisted Malvolio and turned the juice on him. Nothing more than a physical trick."

"You mean the ape actually hypnotized Malvolio?" Daly bleated.

"Why not?"

"You're crazy!" snorted Daly. "They got hypnotists to try and snap Malvolio out of it, remember? And they couldn't."

Lowry lifted his glass. "Well," he

said, easily, "maybe only the original hypnotizer could snap Malvolio out of it. And the police had shot the ape, so it was too bad for Malvolio."

It was then I noticed that Martin had gone. And I wanted to see him, to talk with him. I shoved my chair back and bolted out of the High Spot. Halfway up the street, in the darkness between two street lamps, I overtook him.

"Martin!" I shouted. "Martin!"

He wheeled and faced me. A tense hush fell between us. I broke it, stammering apologies.

"I'm damnably sorry—they didn't realize—look, Martin, you must have some ideas about this thing. Won't it help any to share them with me? I can take it."

HE BACKED away as if I were going to strike him. "No, Spruce It won't help. Even if it would—"

"Just tell me which of the three was right," I pleaded. "You'll feel better for telling me. You'll feel better tomorrow."

"Suppose—" he licked his lips. "Suppose they were all wrong?"

"Wrong? What do you mean? That the orang-outang—"

"Oh, the orang-outang," he repeated, wearily. "I suppose he was just an extra-special orang-outang. I haven't given much thought to him. I can't seem to get past that moment when I looked into Malvolio's eyes — afterwards."

"They must have been terrible," I said, lamely. "Dull and glazed, I suppose, like—"

"They were the eyes of an ape," he stated, quietly.

I tried for the last time to crash the barrier. "Of course, Martin. That's natural, isn't it? I mean—"

"I found myself looking into the eyes of an ape. Can't you understand, Spruce?"

He was stealing away into the shadows, now, and something restrained me from following him. His voice came like a shadow-voice, laden with the mysteries of a shadow-world, speaking words I would rather not have heard:

"I realized that I had *always* been looking into the eyes of an ape."

"No!" I groaned hoarsely. "No!"

"Yes, Spruce. That's why Malvolio couldn't make the grade. That's why the animals were so panicky in his presence — because he brought the jungle into the ring. That's what the lion and Bimbo knew, that's why they were able to thwart and terrify him—since he evidently didn't even have a first-rate ape-brain.

"And that's why, in the orang-outang, he met his master.

"Only"—it was the last whisper—"he never knew any of it, poor changeling that he was. And if you ask me to go back of that, back to the dark limbo that spawned him—if you ask me how or why—you're not wise. Keep your mind off that, Spruce, and you may—keep your mind."

Then he was gone. Gone for good. And I knew that he would never feel any better. Nor would I. I felt like pelting after him, joining him in his lonely pilgrimage in search of comfort. Instead, after some minutes, I went back to the High Spot.

They asked me if I had found Martin. I told them no.

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None Are So Cursed As Those Who See Too Much

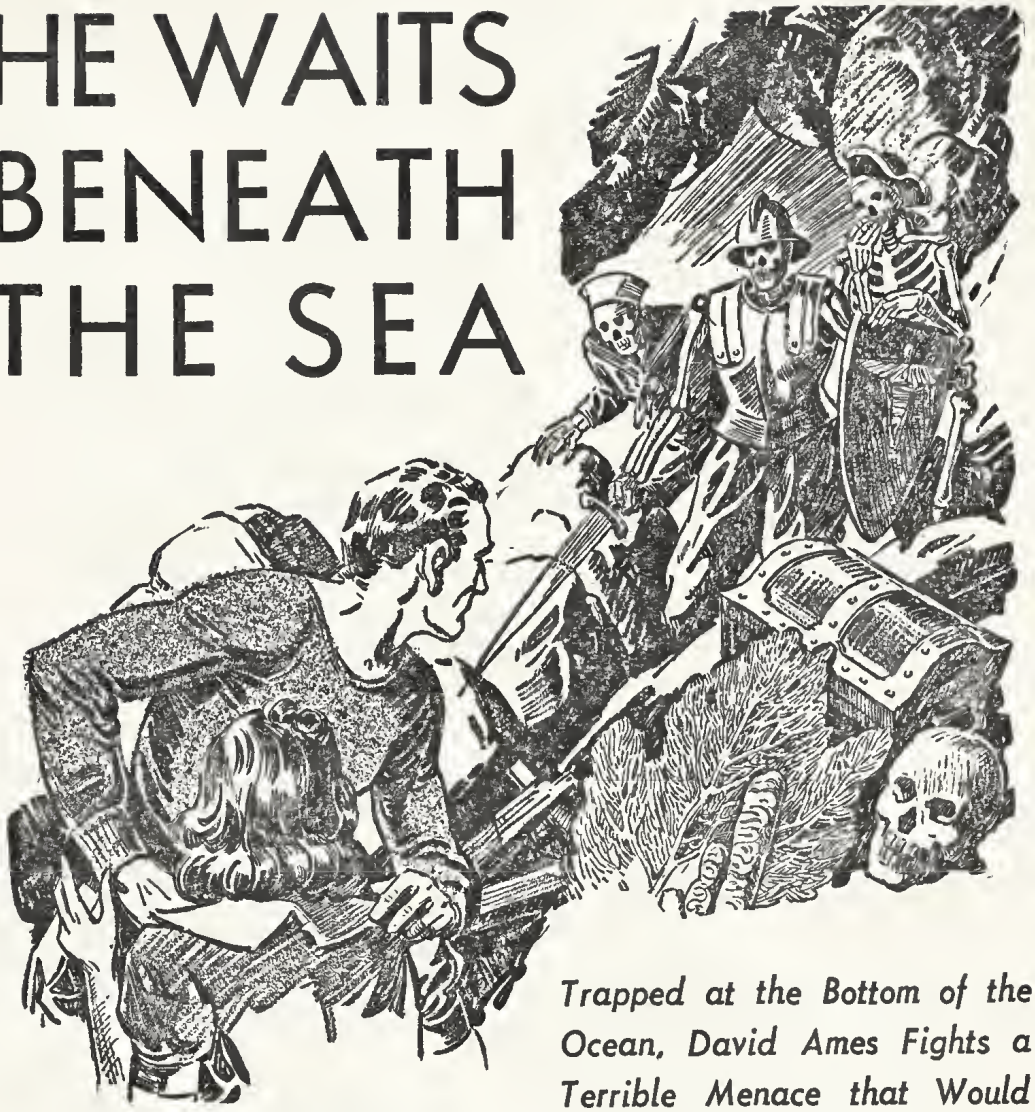
in

THE MAN WHO LOOKED BEYOND

An Eerie Story by CAROL BOYD

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

HE WAITS BENEATH THE SEA



The three figures walked along stiffly, jerkily

Trapped at the Bottom of the Ocean, David Ames Fights a Terrible Menace that Would Rule the World with Cadavers!

By TARLETON FISKE

Author of "The Seal of the Satyr," "Flowers from the Moon," etc.

DAVID AMES took Jean in his arms and kissed her. It was quite characteristic of Ames that he did this efficiently, expertly, and very thoroughly. The result was a scientific kiss, typical of Ames' scientific mind — but it seemed to please the girl. She closed her eyes. So did Ames.

Together the two of them tried to imagine the peaceful waters of the South Atlantic all about them, with a soft tropic moon silvering the waves. It was not a great stretch of the imagination—merely a matter of focusing their minds three thousand feet above them. For, after all, they were in the South Atlantic, and there definitely seemed to be water all about them. But no moon penetrated these depths. David Ames and Jean Banning kissed in a submarine on the ocean floor.

Somewhere in one of the forward

compartments Jean's uncle, Ronald Banning, was working with the crew. The men were checking figures on the charts, estimating and calculating and theorizing in many technical ways which neither Ames nor Jean cared to think about at the moment. All thoughts of the expedition, even the consciousness of their peculiar situation here on the bottom of the sea, did not seem to matter as they embraced again. In their minds, researches in marine biology held no attractions comparable to the quite human biological research of a kiss.

Then came the shock. For a moment neither of them realized that the submarine was lurching. Abruptly, they stepped apart.

"What's up?" Ames muttered.

The ship was moving forward along the ocean floor; not steadily, as a submarine glides, but with a dragging motion that bumped and scraped the bottom. Ames' blue eyes steeled with sudden apprehension. His long legs quickened in hasty strides as he made for the door.

"Wait here, dear," he cautioned the girl. "I'll see what's happened."

BEFORE he crossed the threshold there was a terrific shuddering in the entire submarine, followed by a series of excited shouts from the forward compartments, the sound of tinkling glass and falling instruments. Ames leaped forward just in time to see the iron hatch above the doorway descend with a brazen clang, barring his exit from the compartment.

"David!" The girl clung to him.

And constantly the submarine was dragging, dragging across the rocky bottom. Then a terrific swoop and the ship tilted upwards. An audible roaring from outside proclaimed that the craft was being drawn downward.

Downward? But there was nowhere to go! They were on the ocean floor, three thousand feet below the surface. The ship had been dragged ahead into what—an ocean fissure? And by what?

There was no time to think. Jean shuddered in his arms as Ames endeavored to keep his footing on the shifting floor. The roaring grew louder. The submarine plunged; down, down, through inky, chill waters.

"What is it?" Jean whispered.

Ames' lean face darkened, his tall form tensed as he held the girl more closely to protect her loveliness from a danger he could not name; a question he could not answer.

Twisting, turning, a chip in a black maelstrom, the vessel hurtled down.

"Uncle Ronald and the men," Jean murmured. "They're outside. And the oxygen tanks are in here—"

Ames staggered across the slanting floor, beat vainly at the fallen iron door. He could not lift it, nor would the levers raise the barrier. It was as though some gigantic force held it fast; some gigantic force that was sucking the very submarine itself into the depths.

Gasping, Ames crawled back to the girl. They lay on the tilted floor, clinging tightly as the rocking vessel swung up-ended.

"I—can't—breathe," she gasped.

With a hoarse sob, Ames fought his way to the oxygen outlets. He turned the valves. Life-giving air flooded the stuffy compartment. And they gasped, as still the ship plunged down.

"This is the end," whispered Jean. Her dark eyes rested without fear on Ames' face. "I'm glad we're together."

The supply of oxygen was giving out. And the steel walls were bending like the sides of a paper boat. Ames' temples throbbed as the pressure glued him to the floor. But he smiled as he returned Jean's gaze. They kissed again, and the kiss mingled with the blackness about them.

And then it stopped. With a final tremor the submarine righted itself. The roaring ceased. There was only stillness; deathly stillness all about them. The walls, bent inward, did not collapse. Half-choking, Ames rose to his feet and stumbled to the iron door.

His hand hesitated on the lever. It might not rise. If so, they were trapped in an airless room, countless thousands of feet beneath the sea in some strange fissure in the ocean floor.

Or, then again, it might rise—rise upon a crushed shell beyond, where the submarine had bent inwards due to lack of oxygen to neutralize the tre-

mendous pressure of the depths. In that case, the open door would admit a torrent of flooding waters.

AMES gripped the lever. And then he smelled air. Air seeping through a tiny crevice at the side of the door near the grated hinges on which it lowered. Air from a little crack which during their descent had trickled only water!

But it was incredible—to find air down here. Still, they could not exist much longer in this stifling cell. Ames made his decision. He pulled the lever, breathed a silent prayer as the door rose.

No water entered. But both Ames and the girl uttered a simultaneous gasp.

From the opening, light came. Light on the ocean bottom! Drawing Jean to her feet, Ames moved forward, into shambles.

The rest of the submarine was a wreck. Twisted and battered, the steel sides were bursting in a dozen places. Smashed instruments littered the floor. But there were no bodies. Whether they had floated away or simply had been crushed out of existence, Ames could not say, but he was thankful that the girl had been spared a sight of them.

Only a moment did he glance about, for there was more strangeness ahead.

Through the opened sides Ames saw that the submarine rested in a gigantic cavern, a place totally free of water. From this cave the air blew in, salty and of the sea, but definitely air.

The cavern was lighted; dimly enough, to be sure, yet radiance undeniably poured forth from some unknown source. The light was faintly green, and it cast eery shadows over the rocky walls. There was something ghastly and unnatural about it all, but Ames had no choice. He took Jean's arm, and together they stepped out of the ship.

"Where are we?" the girl whispered.

"In Davy Jones' Locker," Ames answered, and grinned. "But whether it's the Sailor's Snug Harbor or Hell itself, I don't know. I suggest that we investigate."

There was something very strange about all this; the inexplicable wreck, and a descent to a lighted, airy cavern miles below the ocean floor. The sea is large, and water covers three-fourths of the earth's surface. Men have not begun to plumb the secrets of the ocean; science has not fathomed its final mysteries. Ames wondered.

But there was rock beneath their feet, air to breathe, light to guide them. They stepped into the cavern, arm in arm.

It was massive, with high, domed walls which seemed to have no apertures or fissures in the piled rocks. But on all sides, at a distance, stretched little corridors leading off into depths of green twilight. They did not appear to be other than natural formations, yet their design as corridors hinted horridly at the presence of alien life, or intelligent minds which had constructed them.

As Ames and the girl drew near to one cave mouth, Jean drew back, hands brushing her dark curls as she pressed her forehead.

"I'm afraid," she whispered. "Let's not go in."

"We can't stay here," Ames answered. "No food. We must explore; see if there's a way out of here; or if not, how we can remain alive if we must stay."

Jean tried to smile, but she clung to his broad shoulder very tightly with one small hand as they entered the long green corridor that led deep under the rocks.

THEY walked forward in utter silence; the silence of the depths; the silence of the dead and the drowned. There was coldness and dampness in the air about them, as if, it too, were dead and drowned. But the green light mocked and beckoned from ahead, and they went deeper into the unnerving stillness.

"What's that?" The girl's brown eyes widened with sudden fear. "I heard something."

Ames halted. Yes, the silence had been broken. From ahead came a sound —a soft, shuffling sound as though something were being dragged over the rocky floor of the cave.

"Here!" Ames whispered. He drew the girl into a niche between the rocks of the wall, then peered out ahead. And suddenly he saw what was coming—saw that which was never meant to be.

"Good God!" he muttered.

"David—what is it? What's coming?"

David Ames stared with wild eyes into the passageway.

"David, tell me. What's coming?"

The man still stared. "I don't know," he whispered hoarsely. "But I think it's—*Death.*"

Along the corridor the three dragged their way. One was tall and bony, wearing the uniform of the U. S. Navy. It had no face. The second was dressed in rags and finery commingled, with a buccaneer's cap resting on a head of hair matted with seaweed. The third wore iron over a ghastly frame — ancient Spanish breastplates above white nothingness; for it was truly a skeleton in armor.

The three figures walked along stiffly, jerkily, staring straight ahead; one with dead glazed eyes which did not see, the second with red orbs peering from beneath strings of kelp, and the horrible third leering out of no eyes at all—just two black sockets in a skull.

They passed, marching down the corridor into further gloom. Ames drew the trembling girl out as they hastened up the passageway.

"David, what—" she faltered.

"I don't know, dear."

The horrible memory of the marching dead bit into Ames' brain. "Just a little research expedition in marine biology," old Ronald Banning had promised.

To a young scientist in love with a girl whose uncle was bringing her on an expedition, the trip had sounded quite attractive to David Ames at the time. And now—it had led to this. Banning and all the men were dead, the ship had been dragged into a strange, lighted cavern, and he was alone with Jean in a submarine world where dead men walked.

Yet there was nothing to do but go ahead. Go ahead and—

Ames almost stumbled on what lay at the side of the passage. Jean drew back with a shudder of terror.

Two bodies rested in the shadows. The first was dressed in a flowing robe with leather harness. On its sagging head rested a helmet—a Roman helmet, unmistakably. Across the chest, which neither rose nor fell with breath, rested a gleaming sword, a sword of the legion.

Ames gazed incredulously. Then he glanced at the second figure. It was blue and bloated, swollen with water so that the purpling face had thickened. He glanced more closely at the features.

"Steve Bascom!" he muttered. "Steve Bascom!"

"What do you mean, darling?"

"Steve Bascom—I knew him. Eight years ago he died; his boat was sunk by a Government ship. He was a rum-runner; smuggled liquor from Havana to Florida. It's Steve all right—but he's dead!"

FOR a moment longer Ames stood there, then stooped and with an impulsive gesture pulled the sword from the chest of the Roman.

"I don't get this," he said. "But something tells me we'll have a better chance of finding out if I hang onto this sword."

The two turned down the path. Suddenly there was a sound from behind. Ames stood still, then hastened back along the path to where the bodies lay.

They were gone!

And in the distance, that ghastly dragging sound. . . .

Suddenly, without warning, a scream sounded from the bend ahead; a horribly familiar woman's scream.

"Jean!" Ames shouted.

Sword in hand, David Ames rounded the corner. Jean was crouching against the wall, and confronting her with outstretched talons, were three new figures from the depths of nightmare.

The first was a gigantic black, nude and gleaming, swinging forward on ape-like arms—for the creature had no legs; merely twitching stumps that hung from his barrel-waist. The second creature wore a yachting costume, green with slime, and its face was

covered with mossy growth on which snails had feasted. The third horror was merely bones—a partially articulated skeleton with remnants of flesh clinging to talonlike hands. They were closing in on the girl as Ames dashed forward, his sword swinging in a silver arc.

The blade swooped and descended, and the skeleton fell. There was a clicking sound as the bones collapsed into a jumbled heap. The corpse in the yachting outfit turned to confront this unexpected opponent, only to meet the point of Ames' weapon as it thrust full into the moldy horror of the rotted face. The sword sliced through to the neck and tore out of the shoulder, and the monster fell. But the legless, gigantic black grasped the girl in mighty arms, and the snarling African face leered upward as Ames confronted it.

The sword slashed out, but the black dropped Jean and dodged.

Then its great arms rose swiftly and it moved forward, swinging the helpless torso from side to side as the sword missed, lunge after lunge. The bestial countenance seemed to watch Ames as he wielded the blade, and the scientist fancied he saw derision in the queerly dead eyes. All at once the mighty arms rose upward.

Ames felt the limbs close about his neck. The hands dug into his throat, and they were cold with the iciness of death. He felt his body crush against the slimy chest, felt the life-blood oozing through his bursting veins. The sword slipped from his fingers, and he went down into buzzing blackness.

Then came release. The grip relaxed. Jean, brave girl, had pierced the black back with the sword. Now it rose again, and the frantic girl brought it down on the ebon giant's neck. It sliced through the throat and cut the head as though it were a black apple on a brittle branch. The head rolled across the floor. There was no blood—not from the dead.

Ames rose. Sobbing, the girl went to his arms. Ames stood there, quieting her panic as best he could. But his eyes were watching the shambles about him. He saw the skeleton bones still moving on the rocks, saw the green horror in the yachtsman's outfit clawing blindly at its ruined face. He stared at the black, severed head which still leered up at him, just as it had during the silent struggle.

AMES stared at the dead head. And as he did so, black eyelids rolled back, red lips parted, and the head grinned. Then a red mouth opened. A voice came from a throat which should not speak; a deep, blurry voice from far away.

"Go forward, fools. The One Who Waits expects thee."

Blind panic ruled. Turning with insane revulsion, Ames and Jean fled down the corridor while the derisive head grinned after them, its mad, cackling laughter ringing in their ears.

Ames raced through nightmare. Along the twisting emerald-litten corridor he ran; then halted as the girl gasped for lack of breath. They stood huddled together, two tiny figures in the green gloom.

"Oh, David," whimpered Jean.

The tall, blue-eyed man put his arms around the girl, but he maintained a tight grip on the Roman sword. And his mind retained an even tighter grip on reality—if it was reality that he faced here.

"I know," he muttered. "It's awful, but we must face it. Somehow we've landed in a place where dead men walk. All I can piece together seems to hint that these men are—were—sailors of various times. They must have been wrecked and in some way dragged down here throughout the ages. There were skeletons, remember, and a Roman corpse. That means men have been trapped here for thousands of years; are still being trapped, because Steve's body shows it. And someone, or something, animates the bodies; gives them a will to walk and obey commands. *The One Who Waits.* That's all we know."

"It's too awful," Jean whispered faintly. "Let's turn back, David. I can't bear more of this."

"No, dear. We must find out. It's our only hope. I think we had better interview Mr. *One Who Waits,* and if

he proves to be hard to persuade—well, I at least have a chance of putting up a sharp argument." He smiled, fingering the sword, but there was no mirth in his voice.

Together they walked, and now the way widened. The brilliance of the green light blossomed about them, coming from ahead. And together, they emerged from the corridor.

They stood inside a vast bubble in the rock—a great cavern with stone walls egg-shaped on all sides against the sea. At intervals other cave mouths like their own gaped in the rocks. Apparently the caves in the spot where they had landed all led inward to this central chamber.

The vaulted dome was high, and the light seemed to emanate phosphorescently from the murk above. Its actual source was not visible, but it undoubtedly originated in some peculiar gaseous phenomenom actuated by the same freak which had blown this mass of rock into a sealed cavern at the bottom of the sea. For a moment David's scientific soul burned to investigate these submarine marvels, but necessity turned his thoughts elsewhere.

For the cavern was not empty. The vast floor was a charnel-house, littered with bodies. Ames and the girl stared at a world of horror.

VIKINGS in armor, savages in feathers, sailors in dungarees—the whole burial ground of the sea lay exposed to their eyes. Roman galley slaves rested in a final sleep; pirates slumbered after walking the plank of death. There were bodies in the uniforms of Nelson's days; bearded giants from whaling fleets, swarthy corsairs from the Barbary Coast; clean-shaven men of the modern merchant marine.

All were sprawled together in a shambles, rank on rank, in hundreds and thousands they answered the roll-call of the ocean's dead. Here kings and cabin boys, admirals, captains, and common seamen, explorers and pleasure cruisers, cutthroats and missionaries rested in the sea's sleep.

Some of the bodies were skeletonic cadavers; others were blue and bloated with water; some bore wounds and many had given ghastly feast to the fishes. Piled helter-skelter like broken dolls in a toy factory, they lay unmoving, weapons at their sides. Ames thought of the legends of the Sargasso Sea.

Here was the real Port of Lost Ships; the haven of the *Flying Dutchman*. What stories of wreck and battle and storm these men could tell if only they were living!

But—perhaps they *were* living. The terrible memory of those encounters in the caves seared into Ames' brain. These men lay still in death, but they could be revived by *The One Who Waits*.

And *He* waited here!

Beyond the pile of bodies stood the black box. In the center of the chamber it stood on end, like a Chinese coffin. It was closed, sealed, but Ames knew instinctively that it contained Life.

Jean clung to him as he faced the center of the chamber, and her grip tightened as a voice came. It was a voice from nowhere, echoing through the great cavern.

"Ye have come at last," the voice whispered. "After ages, ye have come, just as I have dreamed. I have been lonely here, and ye have come."

There was triumph in the whisper, and a hinted dread.

"Approach me, so that I may look upon ye," the voice droned. "Fear not—I shall clear a path."

And as the two hesitated, the path was cleared. The dead rolled back. A long, shuddering groan swept through the cavern, as though the slumber of many dreamers had been disturbed. Rows of bodies turned on their sides, opening a horrid pathway through the sleepers.

"Come on," Ames whispered. "We must."

He drew the girl with him, and together they walked down the terrible aisle. Ames held his sword in readiness. Jean's eyes never left the bloated bodies of the drowned on either side. Then they stood before the black box.

"Ye need not fear," came the whisper, softer this time. "They cannot harm lest I command it."

"Who are you?" Ames demanded. He controlled his voice only by effort,

for his reason tottered. Addressing an empty black box in a hall filled with drowned men was madness, yet it was true. "Who are you?"

The voice came solemnly and softly. "I am The One Who Waits. I am not of your world—the tiny world above the waters. I come from the sea, from the depths below where once all life began. Ye of the animal world rose to walk on land, but life began in the sea and here it has remained. Here it has developed, and evolution has progressed infinitely further than in your world above."

THE voice paused, then continued. "I find it hard to put into words ye can comprehend. But this I can say—after a time, we below evolved so highly that our bodies disappeared. Only Intelligence remained; an Intelligence so great ye could not begin to understand it. And carrying out the full cycle of Evolution, that Intelligence finally began to die. I am the last survivor; The One Who Waits.

"I was the wisest. I knew the fate in store for me, and so in these final years I have planned. During the past few thousand—ye cannot understand, but such passage of time is comparable to a few of earthly days to you—I have thought and planned and worked to find a way of surviving the doom which lies ahead.

"Long ago, in the days when Atlantis still rose above these waters, our people had achieved a science greater than anything ye know. But as we disembodied, such knowledge became worthless. And ambition died. So that all forgot the secrets we once cherished, all but myself. I remembered.

"And I used them in my plans. With their aid I protected myself when Atlantis sank, survived the earthquake which sent a continent crashing. This hollow cavern saved me, though it destroyed our cities here below. Here I have dwelt and worked. For I evolved a plan of survival.

"There were many bodies in the water when Atlantis fell. Some of these, using the science we had long since discarded as worthless, I reanimated. This I achieved by sending a portion of my intelligence into their dead brains. Once given life again, I set these creatures to work, building this cavern against all future disasters. Then I built the magnet. Ye have not seen that, but ye felt it. It is set above this cavern, directly under the fissure leading to the ocean floor. It drags down every vessel that passes overhead, drags it into the fissure, and to the cavern."

"So that's what pulled our submarine here," Ames muttered. "No wonder the iron door fell and wouldn't raise."

"Precisely," the voice answered, as though reading Ames' thought. "From all these ships I took the bodies of the men. This I have done for centuries. Why, ye ask?"

The voice rose to a passionate crescendo. It was ghastly to hear such emotion rising out of nowhere.

"Because I discovered the way to survive—by putting myself, my intelligence, into a human form! Once that is accomplished, I can rise to the surface of the earth. And then I shall live again—live and rule.

"It will all be so simple. Ye have seen my army here. Stout fighters all; crippled and disabled as they are, they cannot be conquered unless blown to bits, for they are already dead and will not die again. I shall master the tiny upper crust.

"But one thing has halted me. Of all the bodies brought below the surface, none have retained perfection. I shall not enter a drowned or a wounded, or a crippled shell, with my entire intelligence. I waited, knowing sooner or later that a perfect body would be caught. And now—ye have come!"

Unconsciously, Ames raised his sword. A laugh rang out, then silence.

"Strange! I have never laughed before. I know no emotions that ye understand as such. Perhaps it is a symbol of my approaching humanity. Ah, well—I but mean to warn ye that resistance is futile. Ye cannot harm me, for I do not exist in a physical state. Do not trouble to hold the thought any longer. I want one body and I shall take it. Everything is arranged. My army has builded well.

In the cave beyond rest many thousand conveyors—akin to the torpedoes ye use at present, and similar to these—submarines, I believe they are called.

"Ye see, I know thy world. Each of these vessels can hold many men. Once I assume my human guise and send my intelligence forth to animate the others, we shall embark in the vessels and rise to the surface. This world will be destroyed as we pierce the rocky shell and enter the fissure, but no matter. We shall not return. We will conquer the outside earth and resume dominion. I am The One Who Waits—and I need wait no longer. I have chosen my body."

The voice subsided into a dreadful silence.

AND then hideous life rose all about Ames and the girl—life rose from Death.

A dozen bony arms reached out. Corpse-cold fingers clawed. A score of the dead men stiffly hobbled to their feet. Ames was already swinging his blade, and it descended in a pendulum of destruction. As fast as the cadavers approached, his sword sheared out, lopping limbs, slicing throats, ripping bloated bellies. Somewhere behind him Jean fought silently, but Ames was lost in the red fury of this silent, hideous battle with the dead.

And then they were upon him, bearing him down by sheer weight of numbers with their cold, drowned limbs. With a mighty effort he hurled them off, only to go down again. They were all about him now, and he smelled their horrid stench as they gripped his arms and legs, swarmed over him until he was hidden from sight. He would be done for in a moment—

Then the weight relaxed. He was lying only under dead. Dazed, he rose to his feet, comprehending. The Intelligence in the box had thought him finished off, and left, relaxing the will which animated the bodies. Why had it left in such a hurry? Where had it gone, and for what purpose?

Ames whirled.

Jean!

The girl was gone. The cavern was empty, save for the bodies of the dead stretching in waves over the floor.

It had taken Jean away to the chamber where the vessels waited; taken Jean to exchange bodies and summon this horde of drowned to rise upon the earth!

For a moment utter panic swept over the young scientist. This was the end. He turned at a sudden sound.

The dead were rising again.

No; only three had gained their feet. Ames grasped the sword, then watched as the three sightlessly staring figures ignored him and walked across the cavern floor. He understood then, and breathed a blessing.

The One Who Waited was summoning these three to his chamber, wherever that might be. Possibly they were to assist him in whatever final arrangement must be made.

Silently, Ames followed them. He had no idea of the Intelligence's powers; they might be so great that It was watching these dead progress.

Consequently, David Ames walked stiffly, like a resurrected corpse. His face assumed an immobile stare. But he never dropped his sword, and within his brain a small voice called, "Jean—Jean—where are you?"

Down a short corridor he followed the three corpses. One was short and squat like a Frankish galley slave; the second wore the uniform of the French Navy; the third was dressed in modern garb, but the head dangled loosely. The neck was broken and the lolling face swung almost backwards in a ghastly fashion, and there was something evilly familiar about the horrid figure. Ames gasped as he realized.

The once kindly and wrinkled face was now contorted in a grimace of death-agony, and the horrid jaws lolled open—but David Ames realized that the corpse before him was that of Jean's uncle, Ronald Banning marine biologist!

THIS was no time for thinking of such things. The walking dead men were turning the corridor. Swiftly Ames moved forward. The sightless eyes did not even notice him, since the Intelligence behind them was not directing them for that purpose. Ames reached the first man, the

one in the uniform of the French Navy.

He was of Ames' height and general build, though his hair was darker. Ames did not bother to ponder such details. His sword flashed. The figure fell, twitching. The scientist leaped upon it, jerking off the naval coat and the cap. Hastily he donned the disguise, then raced to reach the other two figures just as they entered a rocky cave set back from the walls. The green light burned strongly within. Ames followed the animated body of Ronald Banning into the small cavern.

In the distance, row on row, stood the vessels. They were, to all outward appearances, submarines; yet they were pointed nose upward, straight at the stone ceiling. Ames noticed that they had peculiar torpedolike attachments at the snout—undoubtedly explosive agents to blast the vessels out of the cavern. The foremost one was open, and a light gleamed within, an electric light!

Ames followed the two figures that moved without hesitation toward the open door in the side of the vessel. Then he stood in the cabin.

The black box lay on a table, and before it stood Jean—Jean, terrified, her black hair hanging in disordered loveliness about her piquant face. A thing without a head was holding her—a thing that was scarred and torn by a dozen gaping wounds, yet it gripped her in a steely grasp.

And from the box a voice spoke.

"So. Now, my child, let us begin. The vessel is ready to start. Within a few moments I can summon the rest and fill the other ships. We shall leave at once—my plans are laid. All that remains lies between myself and you."

The girl sobbed. Ames looked ahead in agony. He dared not betray himself. The voice purred on.

"Do not feel badly. I know how emotion affects human kind, but I assure you, it is nothing. Ye are participating in something far greater than has ever occurred before; ye are lending thy body to the most astounding service ever rendered in the Cosmos. Believe me, it is greater thus to die. In no other way could thy life be rendered so worthy. But enough of words—I must act now."

There was a moment of silence, and the headless thing held the girl quite tightly. Suddenly Ames, watching, saw the color draining from Jean's face. Her eyes grew glassy, fixed in a blank stare. They were riveted on the black box, and now the room seemed to whirl as it hummed with unseen power.

A terrific force seemed to be rising from the black box, as though *It* were emerging. There was nothing to see or hear, but the feeling grew. And Jean's face faded. *Another* face was peering through.

The One Who Waits was taking Jean's body!

Then came surcease. Life gradually returned to the girl's face. And from the box came a murmur.

"No—I am not strong enough yet. Never have I permitted myself utterly to enter a single body. It is as I feared—the strain is too great. I must make another attempt, work up to the ordeal more gradually. That is why I summoned these three. They are dead, and a portion of Intelligence has animated them. They have no will of their own, and I can enter into such shells more easily. I shall allow myself to enter one of them as an experiment, and thus strengthen my will for a second experiment with ye. And I shall not fail."

JEAN stood half-swooning from her struggle. The voice in the black box paused, then went on.

"I shall choose this one—with the broken neck. He came with ye, and has never known domination before. Therefore he is stronger than my other servants, and will provide a better final test."

The voice ceased, and for the first time Jean recognized her dead uncle with a look of startled horror. The hideous head dangled, grimacing in her face, and then turned on its stalk-like neck.

The force flooded forth, fiercely. For a moment the room was filled with a pulsing that seemed to shake the walls of the submarine. And then—

"I have triumphed!"

The voice came, not from the box, but from the dead lips on the dead face of Ronald Banning. It came, not from a stiff, unseeing corpse, but from an actual living dead man. The deep voice brought life from dead lungs, breathed horridly as it walked across the submarine cabin.

The girl shuddered. Ames still stood silent, but his legs were trembling,

and he felt the sweat of utter dread upon his brow.

The man with the broken neck, the man with Ronald Banning's face, the man who was not a man but One Who Waits, walked and spoke.

"A human body. Remarkable! I feel life once more—form, corporeal existence. I shall like that. Ye are but a woman, but thy body shall suffice. This one is a broken reed. Ye are young, and strong, and healthy. And I have the strength to enter. Why delay?"

A horribly inhuman chuckle burst from the swollen purple lips.

"I shall hold ye in my arms and breathe my soul into thy form. And then—arise to power!"

The corpse advanced. And Ames acted. His sword thrust upward. At the instant, the figure turned.

"An impostor!" The thing that was not Ronald Banning darted to one side. "Kill him!" he shouted.

And the other two corpses acted.

The galley slave rushed in, arms swinging. But Ames was already lunging with deadly precision, and swept his sword through waist and belly alike with ripping thrust. Jean rushed across the cabin and slammed the door fast. The creature in Banning's body vainly clawed at the handle.

Ames went after him, but slipped and fell. The remaining corpse was on him from the rear, together with the awful headless creature. The three went down together, but Ames held the sword upthrust, and as the headless being fell forward it was pierced. Rolling to one side, Ames again slashed the crippled galley slave. The two bodies lay twitching madly as the scientist rose to his feet and confronted the body of Banning.

"You can't be touched, eh? Disembodied Intelligence?" he grated. "You're alive now, and in a human body! The One Who Waits? Your waiting is—ended."

THE sword came down. There was a shearing sound, as grasped in both hands, the blade cleft through head and neck. Something red and bleeding fell to the floor and lay still. It looked not unlike a human brain.

The pulsing vibrations that had filled the room were ceased. The thing was dead. And Ames turned to look for Jean.

"Jean!" he cried. "What are you doing?"

The girl was fumbling at a panel at the end of the room.

She turned to him with a determined smile.

"We're getting out of here, and right now," she answered.

Her slim hands pulled levers. Suddenly, with a roar and a lurch, the submarine rocketed upward. There was a single grinding shock as the vessel exploded through rocky walls, then merely a steady humming as the righted submarine arose.

From below came a deep, sonorous rumble.

"The cavern is filling in," the girl whispered. "We're going up."

Silently, Ames took her in his arms. Their kiss was long. It was not interrupted until the vessel lurched again. Ames' eyes followed the wall until they reached a periscopic mirror. He nudged the dark-haired girl with a slow grin.

"Look through there," he said. "I can see the stars."

Together, thankfully they gazed on the blue heavens above the South Atlantic.

A Message for His Majesty

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

Author of "Man in the Dark," "Eyes of the Serpent," etc.

"Put the noble count into one of my cages," said Louis

Louis XI, King of France, Has a Mysterious Visitant Who Opens the Dread Door of the Unknown!

LOUIS XI, King of France, walked swiftly toward the throne room. Someone had asked to see him, keeping back his name. Had Burgundy perhaps thought of surrendering? Louis chuckled low in his throat.

Or perhaps Count D'Erblois had been taken—D'Erblois, who took such great delight in playing his little jokes on friends and enemies alike, who had gone too far at last in turning away from his king. His Majesty's bent form trailed a grotesque silhouette along the wall of the corridor.

Arriving at the velvet hangings draped behind the throne, Louis

parted them carefully, his lip pursed, and peered cautiously into the room. Then he stepped into sight of the small group assembled there.

A page came forward, falling to one knee. Louis made a curt gesture, bidding him rise.

"Yet no name?" he snapped. "Has he nothing to say? Who is he? Does no one know him, then?"

"He gives no name, sire. But he says he's expected."

Louis pondered this, caressing his pointed chin with his thin, delicate fingers.

"Expected! Tch! I don't expect him—I expect no one." He shrugged. Closing one eye, he looked calculatingly at the page before him. "But perhaps it's something of good import from Burgundy. Or perhaps some of the renegades have thought better, and wish to come back." He nodded. "Let him come before me in a moment."

HIS MAJESTY looked up, fixing the small company with his eye. He searched each face carefully, though there was little need of that.

"My Lords," he said, "where is Jehan, the Cardinal Balue?"

"Here, sire."

The tall, thin form of His Eminence rose suddenly beyond the group. He had been seated, and though he had seen His Majesty enter the room, he had not chosen to rise.

Louis did not notice his lapse. He nodded, satisfied. "What think you of this man who comes?"

The cardinal shrugged. "I have not thought on the matter, sire."

Louis grimaced.

The page stepped into the throne room at the further end, holding open the door. Through the archway came an elderly nobleman, elegantly dressed. He walked down the long aisle with great care. Louis did not raise his eyes until the man stood before him, but he listened closely to the confused murmurs that rose from the company in the room. Then he looked up.

"D'Erblois!" he exclaimed. He stepped from his throne and came forward a pace. "D'Erblois," he said again. "Yes, it's really you." He looked suspiciously around him. "You're alone, Count?"

"Quite alone, sire." The visitor's eyes were cold. Fixing them upon Louis, he said, "Your Majesty appears suprised. Didn't my message reach you? It was dispatched two days ago, and should by now have been here."

"I had no message from Erblois," said Louis, frowning.

His visitor shrugged. "No matter. Doesn't His Majesty remember that once I promised to return—when my tenure with Burgundy was over?"

Louis sat down again, closing his eyes, and stroking his chin slowly. A slight smile played about his lips. He did not choose to answer his visitor, though he well remembered D'Erblois' letter, flaunting him, promising some day to face the king. Well, D'Erblois' days for joking and tricking were over. Louis spoke suddenly.

"Didn't you know, D'Erblois, that for two months I've sought you? That for two months now I've sworn to have your head?"

The nobleman nodded diffidently. "That concerns me little, sire. I was aware of it."

Louis jerked his head up. "You went over to Burgundy." His cold voice challenged the other.

D'Erblois shrugged. "He paid me well, and money has always been sweet to me."

Louis chuckled. "You'll have no further need of money, Count D'Erblois." His voice was hard. "For two months I've sworn to have your head. Blind man—you walked into my hands!" Louis pursed his lips, closing one eye reflectively.

"Spider!" D'Erblois spat the word. "Gloating on France!"

A spasm of pain crossed His Majesty's face. "I will unify France even if I must first wipe out the Burgundian and his family." Then he spoke sharply. "Seize this man and bind him."

"No need; I'll come."

Louis looked at him craftily. "Very well," he assented. "Your head can wait. You shall have a taste of my iron cages, those lovely cages, D'Erblois, where men go mad so easily."

His Majesty shot a quick glance at the nobleman before him. No expression crossed D'Erblois' face; he still smiled cynically.

LOUIS was annoyed. He motioned curtly for D'Erblois and the others to follow him. Swiftly he passed into the corridor, descended level after level to the lowest cellars, damp and chill, stench-filled. Louis drew a handkerchief and held it to his nostrils, and a faint perfume was wafted to D'Erblois.

His Majesty motioned before him. "My cages, D'Erblois. Here man can neither sit nor stand, nor can he lie down." He chuckled. "I myself devised these for such as you."

Before them loomed an oddly shaped cage of iron, in which was slouched grotesquely the body of someone only recently dead. Sightless eyes stared blankly out of the darkness. The Cardinal Balue shuddered and turned away. D'Erblois looked calmly at the corpse.

Into Louis' eyes a kind of madness had come. He turned to D'Erblois. "Only a short while ago this thing was the Duc de Morneau. He, too, went over to Burgundy, thinking to save himself and his vast estates." He shrugged. "Look upon him. See how he has saved himself. Thus it will go with you also, D'Erblois."

Louis made a sign, and from the darkness around them stepped two scantily clothed cage-keepers. Each of them took D'Erblois by an arm.

"Put the noble count into one of my cages," said Louis. Then he stepped back to watch.

D'Erblois made no move to resist. He went calmly forward, stooped, and stepped into the cage opened for him. The door clanged shut behind him, and the cage-keepers stepped back.

Louis began to chuckle. "Now, my good D'Erblois, how is that? Comfortable, not so?"

"His Majesty concerns himself unnecessarily," said D'Erblois shortly.

Louis was about to speak further when he saw that something was not as it should be. He stepped nearer to the cage. Then he fell back with an oath. D'Erblois was standing erect with apparent ease! But this could not be! No matter what his size, no man could stand, sit, or lie at ease in any of these iron cages. Yet D'Erblois was not bent uncomfortably. Peering closely, it seemed to Louis that the bars had bent away to allow this man to stand upright.

"Another cage," he called. "Put him in another cage." Louis clenched and unclenched his hands angrily. "Who constructed this cage? He'll swing from the gibbet tomorrow."

D'Erblois was shoved into a second cage, even smaller, more oddly shaped than the other. Once more Louis stepped forward, chuckling. Then he stopped, and fury possessed his face. The count was sitting quite comfortably on the floor of the cage.

"His Majesty should not vex himself," D'Erblois said calmly. "Oftimes has the spider done his work for naught."

He jokes with me again thought Louis. Aloud he fumed, "You've become a sage, D'Erblois."

He motioned to the cage-keepers to transfer the count to a third cage, looming shadowy in the darkness. With his handkerchief, Louis brushed away the beads of perspiration formed from his angry ferment, and stepped forward to look at the cage just vacated. Despite the so apparent comfort of D'Erblois, the bars were as always, bent and twisted so that no man could sit at his ease.

HIS MAJESTY peered closely at D'Erblois in the third cage. Was it possible? Could he, Louis, be seeing aright? His cages, those cages which had never failed him before? His Majesty cursed so strongly that the Cardinal Balue stopped up his ears. For the Count D'Erblois was again standing erect, actually leaning up against the bars in ease.

Louis closed his eyes, clenching his hands tightly to control the violent anger that was rising in his breast. Then he threw out his arms, calling in

a loud voice. "D'Erblois has bewitched us so that we can't see truly. Take him to the gibbet!"

He turned abruptly and stamped angrily back up the stone stairs. The unbridled laughter of D'Erblois followed, mocking him. In the corridor beyond the throne room, Louis signed to dismiss the group, retaining only the Cardinal Balue.

"What was it, Jehan?" asked Louis, shaking his head. "It wasn't natural that D'Erblois should so easily escape my vengeance."

The cardinal nodded. "A trick, Your Majesty. Magic. Somehow he blinded us."

Louis wet his lips with his tongue gently, and with one finger caressed his lower lip. "D'Erblois shall not escape the gibbet, Your Eminence. His life must be forfeit for his desertion to Burgundy. I shall unify France, and I need fear for my weapon."

His Majesty clasped his hands behind his back, and walked on with bent head, his flowing black robe trailing along the corridor. The Cardinal Balue came after, his eyes closed; he was deep in puzzled thought.

The king stepped into the throne room, and at once a servant from the courtyard came up to him, prostrating himself before His Majesty. Louis glowered down.

"What's happened?" he muttered. "What is it?"

The servant murmured. "Sire, the Count D'Erblois has escaped. He was gone of a sudden from our midst. We did not see him again."

Louis drew himself together in further fury, controlling himself only with great effort. "D'Erblois escaped! He must be retaken. Look to it, or the gibbet will hold all of you before dusk."

The outer doors were flung open abruptly, and into the throne room walked the page who kept thedoors.

"Sire, a messenger from Erblois province."

Louis started. He felt the cardinal's hand on his arm. "We'll hear what he has to say."

The cardinal's hand tightened on His Majesty's arm. "Perhaps it would be better not to hear this messenger, sire. I have a feeling of ill omen."

His Majesty signed for the cardinal's silence.

A COURIER entered the room, making directly for Louis, whom he had marked from the door. He came to his knees before the king's throne.

"Sire, I am come for Erblois province."

Louis nodded. "You were delayed, then, since you started two days ago?" He remembered D'Erblois' words.

"Sire, I was delayed."

"Your message?" Louis was impatient.

"I am instructed to say to Your Majesty that the lands of Erblois are swung from Burgundy and would come under you, sire, for united France."

Louis thought. Ah, D'Erblois *did* come then to return to France; perhaps I was too hasty, and that was why he chose so to exasperate me. But what did he in the cages?

Louis bent quickly forward. "And Count D'Erblois?"

"Sire, Count D'Erblois died two days ago, within the hour of my leaving."

For a moment Louis stood frozen; then he fell backward, groping for the cardinal's arm. The cardinal stood pale, impassive save to raise his arm and cross himself.

Louis, clutching the cardinal's arm, said, "Jehan—Jehan, we have bad dreams!" and he shuddered violently, passing his finger quickly along his abruptly taut lower lip.

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NEXT ISSUE

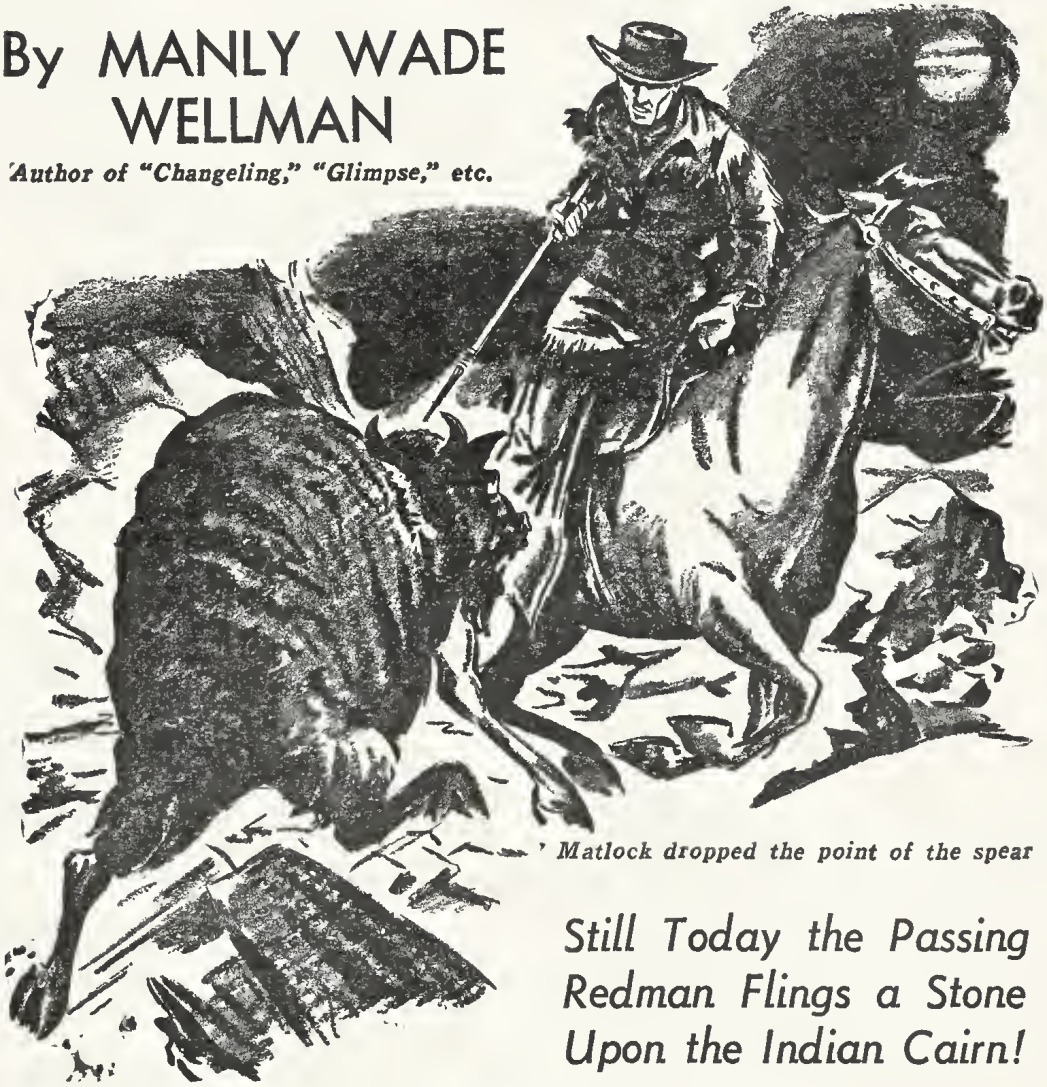
VOICES IN THE WIND

An Uncanny Sea Story by ROBERT EMERICK

HALF BULL

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Author of "Changeling," "Glimpse," etc.



Matlock dropped the point of the spear

Still Today the Passing Redman Flings a Stone Upon the Indian Cairn!

IT STANDS not far from the Platte River, a landmark on the unrelieved level of the prairie—a rough pyramid of stones more than ten feet high, with the road curving widely around it. The town just behind was named after it, Indian Cairn. Oldsters there know, or pretend to know, all about the rock pile.

It was the grave of a savage hero, they say, a chief so respected and loved that this primitive monument was reared in his honor. True, one garrulous old fellow disagrees, and claims to remember the days when the road was only an Indian trail. In those times, he stubbornly insists, it was believed bad luck to come too near the pile, and that explains in his mind the reason for the loop in the road.

It was also customary to throw a stone as one rode by—this does not sound like the Indian idea of honoring the illustrious dead—and sometimes passersby provided themselves with stones whole miles before reaching the spot.

Philip Matlock might have told the truth of it, but he was ever a close-mouthed man. And now he is dead and in a grave of his own, with his name cut upon the granite that marks where he lies. In death's sleep perhaps he has dreams, as Hamlet fancied might befall us; dreams of the wilderness that was not Nebraska in June of 1851—dreams of how he, a twenty-two-year-old free hunter, rode along the banks of the Platte. . . .

YOUNG Philip Matlock was beginning to be hungry. His bright blue eyes scanned the wide prairie as keenly and disappointedly as a castaway on a raft scans the empty waves. He sat a weary bay horse, and his old "eight-squar" Hawkens rifle lay across his arm. His lanky young body was clad in fringed buckskin, made dingy by the smoke of campfires, and he wore beaded moccasins and a wide felt hat. His young beard was small and cider-brown. He had not rested or eaten since the early morning, and it would soon be sunset.

Game had been wary all day, and the young man brightened hungrily when he spied cloven hoofprints. This buffalo must have been smallish, but more than a calf at that. Odd that it should be without herd-companions. Still one beast would be more than enough for his present needs, and indeed for his ride westward to a rendezvous of trapper friends. Glancing to the priming of his piece, Matlock advanced on the trail.

That trail led him away from the river, past a low line of sandy hills and into the prairie, sparsely grown up in grass and as flat and wide as the windless sea. Far ahead toward the horizon showed four little triangles—the teepees of Indians. The hoofprints led in this direction.

That mystified Matlock, for buffalo are normally shy of men. He continued his quest for five minutes more, and saw that the tracks led into a deep ravine.

Perhaps the lone buffalo had been frightened by the Indians, had taken cover. Matlock dismounted at the edge of the ravine, prepared to lead his horse down the bank, then paused. The bottom was full of cottonwood scrub, and no hunter enters thickets blindly.

As he hesitated, rifle in hand and the reins caught in the crook of his arm, he was suddenly aware of a new aspect of the split-wedge marks before his moccasin toes.

A buffalo, like other bovines, makes a sloppy track pattern. The rear hoofs fall behind, touching but not covering the spots just quitted by the front ones, and the result is a doubled impression. But here on the brink of the gully, he realized, the marks were clear and single. All the way back, they were clear and single. Why?

"Maybe it's got only two feet," he mused pleasantly.

His musings came abruptly to an end as the cottonwood scrub stirred in its depths, then became agitated closer to him, closer, as something heavy and confident moved in his direction. Vaguely he saw a shape, dark, powerful and erect.

A brave man admits fear into his thoughts but not into his acts. Philip Matlock was a brave man, and he knew there was something present of which to be afraid. Planting his moccasined feet, he moved his Hawkens to the ready.

BUT his horse lacked his master's sternness of fiber. It snorted hysterically, jerked free and ran. And because no man could survive afoot here, Matlock hurried after it.

The beast was a good one, and he had trained it from a colt, but he had to whistle and coax for five minutes before he got the reins into his hand. Then, when he swung into the saddle and tried to approach the ravine once more, he found himself with an equine rebellion on his hands that would have done credit to the wildest mustang. Matlock swore, then took thought.

He dismissed his original fear. The thing in the ravine was probably a hunter from the Indian camp. No reason to pick a quarrel. Better seek refreshment at the lodges. Matlock prodded his horse's ribs, and headed for the camp.

Not many whites would have done that, but Matlock understood and

liked Indians to a depth almost mystical. Cantering closer, he saw by the make of teepees that these were Tsitsichah, or Cheyennes. No horses or sentinels were visible, but one or two human figures moved cautiously into view, regarding him fixedly. Matlock flung up his right hand in the universal peace sign, then trotted confidently in.

There were about a dozen Cheyennes, men and women, and they stared with a concentrated suspicion that another man would think baleful. Matlock greeted them in their own tongue, dismounted, and held the edge of his hand to his stomach, signifying hunger.

"The Cheyennes hunger, too," said the oldest and tallest man, in the deep tones reserved by Indians for formal discourse.

"Why does not my father hunt?" asked Matlock, studying the faces around him. They were very gaunt.

"Our horses ran away," replied the old Indian, and again Matlock was aware of the lack of mounts. The younger men were studying his own bay with yearning, and Matlock balanced his rifle ostentatiously at the ready, making an offer.

"I have no meat. My hunt was unlucky. But in my saddlebags are coffee and sugar, and upon my blanket roll my Cheyenne brothers will see a sack of flour. Let me sleep here as a guest, and we will all eat."

The old Indian did not grow cheerful. "Hunger returns in the morning. Our horses are gone. We will starve."

"Tomorrow," continued Matlock, "I shall ride out and find my brothers' horses."

AT THAT the old man jerked his chin in approval, and the horse-coveters subsided. Matlock knew himself safe, and unlashed from his saddle the limp sack that held ten pounds or so of flour. The circle of Indians watched him intently, but no graven face betrayed eagerness.

"Bring water," Matlock called, and two women, one old and one young, went at the tall leader's gesture into a teepee. They returned with earthen pots. "Is it enough?" the younger woman asked. "The Cheyennes have no more."

"Is there not a spring?" demanded Matlock, stirring up a batter.

She shook her head. "The spring is running low. There is nothing but mud."

"Fire," said Matlock, and the young woman who had spoken threw wood on a heap of dying embers. She moved gracefully, the white man thought, and her fine-boned face between its glossy black braids had primitive beauty. He set his griddle upon two propping stones—he was young enough on the frontier to retain such traps of civilization. Rubbing it with old bacon rinds, he made flapjacks as long as the batter lasted. Meanwhile the woman brewed all his coffee and sugar together in a kettle. Everyone in the camp had food and drink, Matlock eating beside the old chief, Lost Wolf.

"We hunted here because the Pawnees fear the country," Lost Wolf condescended to explain at last. "The spirits protect the buffalo herds. We did not believe at first; but, twenty days ago, we shot one buffalo and camped here. That night the Half Bull drove away our horses."

Matlock was startled. The memory of the hoofprints had come back to him. Yet he had heard the name before in his wanderings.

"While you slept? What is this Half Bull?" Matlock asked in low tones.

"One of our women saw—my daughter, Rain Feather. Let her speak."

At his gesture, the graceful young woman who had built the fire came forward.

"All had eaten heavily but I," she began, her eyes lowering shyly before Matlock's interested gaze. "I was sick in the throat—a dryness—and took only hot water. So, when others slept, I felt hungry. I got up and hunted for a piece of cooked meat. As I did so, I heard the horses."

"Running away?" prompted Matlock.

"Yes. I went to the door of the lodge—they had dragged their picket pins, and were running north." She pointed the direction, Indian fashion,

with open palm outward. Matlock noticed that her hands and wrists had the slender grace of a Spanish lady's. "As I watched," she went on, "the Half Bull turned from driving them, turned back toward our camp."

"What does my sister mean by a Half Bull?" asked Matlock, trying to bring to the surface the bits of Indian spiritism his plainsman's life had stored in his mind.

Rain Feather made gestures with her fingers, as though to outline the creature in the air. "It was like the forepart of a buffalo. A hump, shoulders, horns—and black wool over all. This stood on two feet, and looked."

Matlock nodded. He was remembering the tracks, and the thing that had lurked, as though in ambush, among the scrub of the ravine. He remembered, too, certain legends that were of his own race and not of the Indians—satyrs, demons and such. Yet he sought for a more rational explanation.

"Perhaps," he offered, "it was a man dressed in a buffalo robe."

AGAIN Rain Feather shook her pretty head.

"I have seen men dressed so, for the hunters' dances. Not so this one. This was a spirit, with eyes that gleamed like fire. And it laughed a bad laugh."

She shuddered. It was the first time Matlock had ever seen a grown Indian do that.

"I called my father, Lost Wolf. The spirit was gone when he came."

Her recital finished, she backed away and sat with the other women. She had been remarkably pretty and mannerly, and eloquent as well. Her story brought more strongly into shape the monsters Matlock had remembered from old legends—if they were legends.

He reviewed them before his mind's eye. The Minotaur, compounded of man and bull, that ate human flesh and was destroyed by Theseus; the tauranthropoid statues found among Assyrian and Chaldean ruins; Pan, the half-animal god of Grecian wilds, who brought fear upon those who ventured too near him—wasn't there some clue to the word "panic" in his name?

And then there was the popular conception of the very Prince of Darkness, as a hairy hulk with great horns and cloven hoofs, whose approach meant dire destruction. All these things, part man and part beast, by that mixture embodied a fearful power and malevolence beyond anything mortal. Matlock remembered the hoofprints. He was troubled.

A younger man was volunteering more information:

"The Pawnees say that the Half Bull was born of a woman, whose husband was a spirit. It can do harm, but cannot itself be killed."

"Such births happen," said Matlock, and his bearded young face was illumined by a grave smile. "Among white people, a child was born thus. It is so stated in the Book the missionaries bring. The child was wise and good, becoming chief and prophet over many peoples."

"Of that great chief I have heard," said Lost Wolf.

The girl, Rain Feather, bent forward to listen, and others showed interest.

Had Matlock been of the missionary type, he might have made converts then in the sunset. As it was, he told them something about Jesus Christ, in terms that the Cheyennes understood. To illustrate, he drew his hunting knife and cut in the earth the sign of the cross. The crucifixion episode gave the conversation another turn, for Lost Wolf spoke of famous torture-events, and the varying degrees of courage and stoicism displayed by the victims.

After several had remarked appropriately, Lost Wolf produced a red stone pipe with a long stem. He filled it with a mixture of tobacco and kinnikinnik, lighted it with a splinter from the cooking fire, and passed it to Matlock. The white man drew a grateful puff; this pipe made him warmly welcome. The chief then passed it to the other men. Each drew smoke, thereby accepting Matlock as guest and friend.

Then, and not until then, Matlock told of his afternoon's adventure. All listened courteously, interrupting only with an occasional guttural "Wagh!", and none suggested amaze-

ment or disbelief. To these savages a ghost or demon was as real as a deer or coyote. When Matlock finished, the chief again spoke:

"That, assuredly, was the Half Bull. It spies upon us. For twenty days we have been without horses, eating as little as possible. Yesterday we finished the last of the one buffalo we killed, and today the water of the spring gave out."

"Has not my father sent out hunters on foot?" asked Matlock.

"It would have been useless. There is no game. The Half Bull told it to leave us, so it did. We must starve."

Matlock remembered his own fruitless hunt. "I do not understand the why of this," he said.

"The Half Bull feeds on men's ghosts," was the grim reply. "When we die, it will come and eat our ghosts as they leave our bodies. No single one will reach the Shining Lodge."

Matlock was aware of horror among the listeners. They did not flinch or change expression, but beneath their steadfast poses their hearts quailed—and Cheyennes are almost impossible to daunt.

Matlock digested this latest aspect of the Half Bull story, wherein the monster seized and engulfed the very souls of doomed dead men. He remembered another thing, a picture he had seen in St. Louis. It was an engraved copy of a mural painting in a cathedral of France—a wretched horde in a fire-lighted cavern, and a towering thing with a hideous horned brow, thrusting one struggling wretch into its fanged jaws. *Satan devouring lost souls. . . .*

He found it necessary to tell himself, once again, that he was not afraid.

The Cheyennes were. It was plain that the story of the Half Bull was part of their spiritual life and consciousness. They feared not for their physical selves but for the annihilation of their souls that hungered for the Shining Lodge.

"Perhaps," Matlock said encouragingly, "I can hunt this buffalo spirit and kill it."

But the Indians shook their heads. The young man who had offered the Pawnee legend of the monster's spirit-origin again spoke:

"The Half Bull cannot be killed. Spirits and witches have enchantment that turns away arrows or bullets."

Night had well fallen, and the women stirred up the fire. Matlock rummaged for his pipe, an odorous old briar, and alternated puffs with Lost Wolf. Finally the white man mentioned his long journey and his weariness.

"My son will share my lodge," said the chief at once. He motioned for Rain Feather to conduct the guest. Others also rose and sought their shelters.

Matlock tossed his blankets and saddle-bags just inside the door of the lodge to which Rain Feather demurely led him. Near this doorway he tethered his horse, driving the picket pin well into the earth. Then he decided that, guest or no guest, he would take no chances. From his saddle-bag he took a coil of leather cord, thin but strong, and looped it around the horse's neck. The other end he carried into the lodge with him.

LOST WOLF, Rain Feather and an older squaw were all preparing for bed in the darkness, through which glowed only the red coal of the chief's final pipe. Matlock doffed his own fringed hunting shirt, leggings and moccasins, retaining a breechclout similar to those worn by the Indians. As he lay down, his rifle ready loaded at his right elbow, he fastened the end of the leather cord to his left wrist. A thief or enemy, pulling up the picket pin, would miss this second line in the darkness; the horse would tug its master into wakefulness.

He had been asleep for not more than two hours, when it happened.

Just such a tug upon his left arm whipped him awake, even as it fetched him out of the blankets. His clutching right hand brought along the rifle. Next moment he was outside the lodge, jerked erect and bracing his bare feet hard to hold the plunging, fighting horse. His eyes cleared of sleep, and he saw what was happening.

Something was shoving and scrambling against the animal's flank. The

thing looked misshapenly human, blacker than the surrounding dim night, and it rounded its horned head against the horse as though raking it. A whinny of pain rang out. The tortured beast, springing away to the full length of the line, threw the attacker clear for the moment. Matlock saw that attacker plain.

Beneath the horns gleamed a wet-looking muzzle, bearded darkly, and set with eyes that shone. The head was thrust down and forward, with a shaggy bunch of back above.

Standing thus, on two wide-set legs, the thing was almost as tall as a man, and powerfully thick. Matlock saw no upper limbs, but he thought it had them. All this he took in with his trained hunter's eyes, in a trifle of time, and remembered Rain Feather's words—the forepart of a buffalo. Thus, indeed, would a buffalo look, if it were shorn away behind the withers, and lived. He had seen this creature's hoofprints!

Still fighting left-handedly to conquer the panic-whelmed horse, Matlock fetched up his rifle with his right.

It was a long gun but well balanced, and Matlock held it steady. The horned head dipped and the creature hurtled itself at him just as he fired. There was a reeling halt in mid-charge, a planting of deformed-looking feet, then it closed in.

Matlock, leaning strongly against the drag of the line, flung up his rifle to use as a club. But the monster had paused again, almost within reach. It glared and panted, and he could see foam on its beard. Then it swiveled like a vane in a high wind, and darted away behind a lodge. As it fled, Matlock saw one thing more—its pumping legs did not bend forward as with knees, but backward as with elbows. There, at least, it was the hinder part of an animal.

But it was gone, and Matlock, hampered by his frightened horse and with only an empty gun, could not follow.

THE Cheyennes were out of their beds, in various stages of undress. Several hunters ran out and helped quiet the horse. The others clustered around Matlock, even the stark Lost Wolf betraying apprehension.

There was more talk than one is apt to get from Indians. Full half a dozen, waking and rising at the sound of Matlock's shot, had seen the visitor, and none was for taking the trail. Matlock, examining his horse, found its flank ripped, as though by horns.

He made a dressing for the wound out of the empty flour sack, remembered the scarcity of water, and sought the failing spring. It was a mere pit in the ground near the lodges, a sunken funnel of sticky mud, and he had a hard time finding water. Lying flat in the muck, he reached the sack down at arm's length into the funnel and wrung it out in the dregs of the spring.

Returning to place the wet cloth on the wounded flank, he found the women building up the fire with wood and buffalo chips. As the flames rose in grateful red light, Lost Wolf's sharp eyes focused on something that lay on the trampled earth.

"Wagh!" he grunted, and stooped for it—a leaden bullet, flattened as though it had struck a stone.

"It is from my gun," said Matlock, peering. "You are right. The Half Bull cannot be wounded. It is strange that he did not kill me."

"Here, perhaps," said the soft, grave voice of Rain Feather, "is why he did not do that—the white man's medicine, of which you told us."

She knelt, blanket-wrapped, and touched with a diffident hand the cross which Matlock had cut in the earth to illustrate his tale of the evening before. It had certainly lain between him and the apparition, and close to its edge were two deep hoofmarks.

"It feared your medicine," said Rain Feather.

"If it fears, it can be fought," said Matlock, feeling a stirring of hope among his doubts.

The Cheyennes gathered around him, silent but tense. Matlock spoke:

"If this is a spirit, it must be fought with spirit weapons." Through his mind raced more of the legends he had heard as a boy. Witch, werewolf, goblin, demon—terrible, but not all-

powerful. How to destroy them, then? The legend had an answer to that—silver bullet. Yet on this score Matlock was inclined to be skeptical. It did not seem logical that a physical thing could avail against the non-physical. Still, a sensible man tried all things.

"This is an evil, and its wish is to do harm," he said earnestly. "Unlike men, who do wrong to win possessions, it does wrong for wrong's own sake. Wrong is sweet in its mouth. Now, is there silver among you? A bead or a thimble, to load into my gun?"

Lost Wolf shook his head, but Rain Feather silently held out her arm. Its wrist wore a narrow, open bracelet, hammered probably from coins. Matlock extended his hand, and Rain Feather laid the ornament upon it.

THERE was no time to cast bullets, but Matlock was resourceful. Using his rifle barrel as a lever, he pried the bracelet out of its curve, then, pressing it upon his knee with both hands, bent it into something like a rod. Next he sought two stones, one flat for an anvil, the other small and heavy for a hammer. All watched in awe as he wrapped one end of his silver bar in buckskin rags and heated the other tip in the fire. It glowed, and he pounded it carefully between the stones. After several heatings and poundings, it developed a point. He cooled it in the mud of the spring, then tried it gingerly on his finger-tip. True, it was a blade now and not a bullet, but it was of silver.

"Now a long stick," he requested, and Lost Wolf's old squaw brought him one. He split the tip and with a piece of his halter cord he bound the improvised skewer into it. The completed stabbing-spear he hefted experimentally, then turned from the fire and stared into the darkness. He had a sense of being watched from that black hiding.

"What will my son do?" asked Lost Wolf, and Rain Feather looked with big, worried eyes.

"I hunt the Half Bull," replied Matlock. He drew his hunting knife. It was of French make, with a cross-hilt.

"*Wagh!*" agreed Lost Wolf deeply, and others grunted in corroboration.

"If I conquer him, I will return before dawn," Matlock said, his voice still quieter.

"And if you do not return?" Rain Feather made bold to ask.

For answer, he gave her the hunting knife. "Keep this. The white man's medicine is best in a maiden's hands. If the Half Bull comes, show him the knife—no, not the point. Hold the hilt straight up. Yes, like that. He will see the cross. Perhaps he will fear again, if in truth he feared the first time."

'But when we have starved to death—" began Lost Wolf.

"Before you die," directed Matlock, drawing upon his own simple faith, "come all together and touch each of you the cross of the knife with the mouth—thus." Bowing, he kissed the hilt in Rain Feather's hands. "That will give your ghosts strength to avoid their enemy. He cannot catch and eat them, as you fear. Your ghosts will come safe to the Shining Lodge."

Matlock had doubts of his right thus to define and award the office of absolution among heathens, but Rain Feather gazed at him with honest veneration, and the men voiced gutteral *waghs* of gratitude. The white man drew on his buckskins and saddled his horse, cinching it loosely over the wounds.

"I ride now," he said in parting. "If I do not come back, Lost Wolf, divide my rifle and other things among my Cheyenne brothers and sisters."

HE headed his horse straight into the night. After a few moments he glanced back. The fire seemed dim and small, and the figures around it frail. Meanwhile, somewhere in the night lurked the horned buffalo-thing that walked on two hoofs and was proof against lead shot. Matlock gripped his lance tightly, as if it might get away; that was as close as he let himself come to admitting uneasiness. Riding on for a space, he suddenly lifted his voice:

"Half Bull!" he yelled his loudest. "I am the white man, come after you!"

An echo, faint and far, seemed to answer him. That was strange, in this mountainless country. He tried again:

"You ran from me—now I run after you! Come, fight like a warrior!"

He had spoken in Cheyenne, and after a moment he repeated his challenge in Pawnee. Once more nothing save that unaccountable echo. Matlock began to vaunt, like a young Indian warrior goading an enemy:

"*Wagh!* I am a mighty fighter, a bad man. I would rather fight than eat. The blows of enemies are like a woman's caresses to me. Come out and fight, Half Bull, or I will shout your cowardice up to the gates of the Shining Lodge!"

His trotting horse suddenly pitched, telescoped itself and reared, almost unseating him. Lying along its neck to keep in the saddle, Matlock found himself looking forward and down into the wide, burning eyes of the horned demon he had come to fight.

Prancing and wheeling on its hind feet, his horse came down again and bolted. At the same time the monster ran in, fastening in some strange way upon his leg—perhaps with its teeth, though Matlock could never be sure.

He was conscious of foulness in that touch, even through his buckskin. Unable to thrust at such close quarters, he battered futilely at the horned head with the butt of his lance. Only a quick grab at the saddle-horn kept him from being dragged down.

"No, you don't!" he yelled in English, and the pitching of his horse, together with his own frantic kicking and hammering, broke the hold upon him. The Half Bull roared, not like a real bull but with a high, human voice. The thing still ran along beside him, its two hoofs as swift as the horse's four.

In holding on, Matlock lost his bridle. He cursed his mount for fleeing yet again from the creature he would face, twisting in his saddle to see the attack that was coming. It came. Swerving in as it ran at his side, the thing emitted something like a throaty, mocking chortle. It was trying to seize his leg again. Matlock dipped the silver point of his lance and met the rush, as a picador in the bull-ring meets the broadside charge of his mighty opponent.

HIS ears rang with a short, fierce scream. Next moment the weapoon pushed back hard against his grip, again he clutched the saddle-horn. That was too much for the loose girth, and the saddle slid around on the far side of the running horse.

Matlock shot through the air. He fell heavily, but was up again, shaken yet conscious. The bay had sped away and the Half Bull was chivvying it along with sidelong rakes of its horns.

Matlock still held the spear. He saw something in the almost-dark—his silver point, that he had held full against the monster, was bent almost double.

He ran. Silver would not avail, either—the Half Bull was a demon beyond the knowledge and defense of white men's spiritual enemies. As Matlock raced, he heard behind him a rattle of hoofs. Two hoofs, hard and swift and rhythmic, *pit-pat, pit-pat.*

He was heading for the camp and the fire. It grew larger, brighter, before his eyes. His pursuer was drawing closer, closer, with every leap. He fancied he felt its breath, like a furnace-blast of deadly hate. He knew, without looking back, that its head was down, its horns point-blanked against the target of his fleeting back. He must dodge to one side—too late for that.

Ahead of him the ground looked darker than the dark. The spring was in his way, a marshy funnel full six feet across. He sprang out over it with all his strength, gained the far brink, and whirled away to one side. As he did so, he realized, too late, that the Half Bull would blunder on into the camp, among the helpless Indians.

But no form hurtled past him. He spun around as he ran, to see where it lurked to charge him again. He saw only the dark blotch of the sunken spring, but darker. The Half Bull had charged, unseeingly, full into it. Now it was struggling violently and vainly. Erect, of great weight, supported upon two small sharp hoofs, it had struck deep into the mud. It fitted tightly into that crumble-walled

tube. It had no arms, and it could not get out.

What Matlock did then was bravely terrible. Unarmed, on foot, he ran at the half-mired grotesque figure. Only its humped shoulders, its shaggy head with the tossing horns, showed above the level of the prairie. And, as he came up to it, Matlock sprang into the air. With all the weight of his body he came down upon it, one moccasin upon the curve of its hump, the other planted firmly between its horns. There was a loud, groaning expulsion of air from great lungs, and the bulk sank deeper into the mud. Then the head jerked upward, and Matlock flew away from it, as though he were a garment in the breeze.

But he was back at it again in a thrice. With his feet he spurned great clods and divots of the damp earth around the spring, spurned them upon and against his trapped enemy. He bent, scooped mud with his hands. Once again he saw that wrathful black face, the night making it indistinct even so close, yet full of hate and sin and strange knowledge; then he hurled his mud upon it, blotting it away.

Somebody had run close to his side, and he sprang instinctively away; but it was Rain Feather. She had spied him, and approaching, saw what he was doing. She, too, threw earth and mud upon the half-buried demon. Others of the camp came, understood, and helped.

"Cover it up," directed Matlock, gasping with his own efforts. "Deeper, deeper. Make a grave for it. We may not kill it, but we can imprison it—forever—under the weight of earth. The Cheyenne must have no further room for the Half Bull in their hearts!"

DAWN came up in timid gray streaks as the Indians finished their mound. It was five feet high and a dozen feet in diameter, completely obliterating the spring and the captive underneath. Upon it they heaped all the stones they could find.

"Bring firewood," now ordered Lost Wolf. "All the fuel we have. Burn it upon this mound, to dry and harden the mud. And let each of us say a prayer to his own spirit, that the earth never be opened."

An old woman whimpered in sudden nervousness. Great dark shapes were approaching in the growing light. But Matlock recognized those shapes, and laughed, and went forward with two of the men. They came back leading horses. Behind them ambled still others, the herd that had been missing for twenty days and now returned as though to a reassuring summons.

"*Wagh!*" spoke Lost Wolf. "This shows that the power of the Half Bull is at an end." He gazed at the tomb.

"Hereafter, when we hunt in this country, each of us will throw more stones upon the mound," continued Lost Wolf. "This will make greater the weight that holds the earth down. Others will learn the custom from us, and do likewise. Half Bull will not break from under that pile. If he truly cannot die, at least he will not hurt anybody again. He will stay and dream of the evil he cannot do—dream until the end of time."

"Until the end of time," repeated Matlock.

In the early dawn, pronghorn antelopes were visible in the distance that had so long been empty of game. The Cheyenne hunters rode out to kill and butcher five. After eating heartily, Matlock accepted a supply of choice meat, said solemn farewells all around and mounted his own recaptured horse. He rode past the silent, earth-packed mound, and yet again his beast seemed to scent a frightening odor and sidled away. But Matlock serenely cast an apple-sized stone upon the pile, observing the custom which Lost Wolf had decreed. His heart was at rest about the matter.

He glanced back once, and saw Rain Feather standing apart from her people. Her eyes were following him, and her slim hand clutched his hunting knife, crucifix fashion, to her young breast.

This then is the story of the Indian Cairn. And still today, the passing redman, eyeing it, flings a stone upon it, even though he has forgotten the reason for doing so.

The GHOSTLY

By
A. HYATT VERRILL
Author of "Monsters of the Ray," "The Death Drum," etc.

DO I believe in ghosts? Listen, Mister, seeing's believing, isn't it. I've seen ghosts, leastwise, I've seen one—and, by Judas, I'm not hankering to see another.

No, I wasn't "seeing things," and I'm no drinking man and never was. And what's more every man aboard the ship saw the same, not once but maybe a dozen times.

Of course, such things can't happen these days, what with Seamen's Unions, wireless and radio, and all the rest. Why, Lord love you, a skipper ain't master of his own ship these days, with shore law aboard ship. But in the days when I went to sea a master was master, and the only law out of soundings was what the Old Man said. You don't see why law and unions and radio should keep ghosts from boarding ships, you say? Well, maybe they don't; there may be haunted ships sailing the seas nowadays for all I know. But when I say such things can't happen these days, I mean the things that were the reason for the ghost being aboard the *Enterprise*.

I was second mate on the *Enterprise* at the time, a full-rigged ship that was a sweet sight for a sailorman's eyes, what with her clipper bow and pole bowsprit and topmasts and flying kites carrying royals and skysails. Reminded me of some women, she did—pretty as a picture but with the devil in her heart. For all her sweet looks the *Enterprise* was a hell ship once she dropped a towline and yards were braced and she was on her course.

No, it wasn't the ship herself, as fine a hooker as ever I signed articles on, but the Old Man. If ever the devil paced a quarter-deck he was Cap'n Prout. Part owner he was and a good navigator, but surly as a bull whale with an iron in his side and with eyes as cold and cruel as the eyes of a tiger shark.

Next second the captain whipped

A Downeaster, he was forever mak-

VENGEANCE

Captain Prout Sails with Doom when a Wraith of the Sea Seeks to Even Scores with Life!

out his pistol and fired at the ghost

ing out to be a religious, God-fearing Christian. And along with all that, he was the most superstitious man I've ever come across.

Eastwood, the mate, was a real bucko and tougher than the Old Man himself. I never laid claims to being soft myself, but, by glory, it turned my stomach the way that bucko mate and the old sea-louse of a skipper treated the men aboard the *Enterprise.* I recollect one day when we were a week or so out, one of the boys was ordered aloft to clear a block that was jammed on the main royal halyards. He was just a kid and green —never been to sea before, and he couldn't make it above the lower topsail yard. All the cussing of the mate didn't move him, and grabbing a belaying pin, Mr. Mate jumped for the ratlines.

"Don't trouble to go aloft, Mr. Eastwood," said the Old Man. "As long as he don't wish to go up I'll bring him down."

THEN he out with the pistol he always carried and fired away at the boy. At the second shot the lad gave an awful yell and came tumbling down. Lucky for him he landed in the mainsail that had been clewed up or he'd have been smashed flat when he hit the deck. He wasn't hurt very bad, just his arm broke where the bullet hit, but no fault of the canting old murderer aft that he wasn't killed.

It wasn't a happy ship, and worst of all, we were bound for Valparaiso which meant we'd be two or maybe three months at sea with no chance of the men jumping ship and getting clear of the floating hell she was. It was a wonder they didn't mutiny afore we crossed the Line, but they were a decent crew—mostly Yanks, with a sprinkling of Blue Noses, and the bos'n who was a Portugee from Fayal. A steady, hard-working sailor man he was, for all his yellow skin and the creepy yarns of ghosts and witches and Lord knows what he was forever spinning.

I had to berth aft and eat at the cabin table with the Old Man and Eastwood, but I left the dirty work to them, and the men all knew that I hated the pair as much as did any of the fo'c'sle hands. Once or twice the Old Man and me had words over it, but he knew he couldn't scare me and couldn't do without me, either, so he decided to let me be.

We had a pretty fair run till we were off the Amazon. Then it fell flat calm and we drifted with the current for three mortal weeks. And hot! Like an oven it was, decks so blazing hot even the men couldn't go barefooted, and the pumps going half the time to slosh the decks and topsides to stop the seams from opening up. That greasy, flat calm made the skipper uglier than ever. It was downright ghastly, and we'd all of us gone stark, staring mad if a light wind hadn't come up and we got under way at last.

It was a day or two after we was again on our course that the mate ordered the bo'sun aft to do some little job on the cabin skylight.

The Old Man was below, reading his Bible, while Manuel was working. I didn't see just how it happened, but somehow or other the bo'sun dropped his hammer through the open skylight and it landed alongside the cap'n down below.

The next second the Old Man was roaring and cussing up the companionway.

"Damn you, you lousy black Portugee!" he yelled, as he saw Manuel bending over the skylight looking down for his hammer. "You tried to murder me, damn you. Take that, you blankety-blank son of Satan!"

As he spoke he yanked out his pistol and before the bo'sun could turn about, the Old Man fired point-blank.

MANUEL gave a blood-curdling yell, clapped one hand to his side and staggered for'ard. Before he got to the break of the poop the damned old pirate fired again, and the bo'sun jerked and fell face down onto the deck just abaft the mizzenmast.

The Old Man stuck his pistol back under his coat and turned to where I was standing too cussed mad and shocked to move.

"Mr. Barton," he said in a nasty tone and grinning like a shark. "Have that carrion tossed overside and have the men swab up that mess on the deck. Any man who dares attempt violence on this ship will meet the same end."

It was cold-blooded murder, and I could see the crew for'ard drawing together and looking ugly. They had seen Manuel killed. I expected they'd start a mutiny any minute. And, by glory, if they had, I wouldn't have lifted a finger or said a word to stop them. Still, I was an officer and I managed to keep a civil tongue though it pretty near choked me.

"Do you mean, sir," I said, "that the bo'sun is not to be given Christian burial?"

"Burial?" he roared, his eyes blazing. "Christian burial for a murderous mutineer! Obey my orders, Mr. Barton, or you'll go next."

"You can murder the hands," I told him, "and get by with it—maybe. But you can't shoot your officers, and you know it, you brute. If you won't give Manuel proper burial you'll be damned sorry for this before the voyage is over. You can heave the bo'sun's body over the rail, but that won't be the end of him."

I thought sure he'd shoot me, he was so furious. He half-drew his pistol, his lips snarled back over his big teeth and his eyes blazing. But just then the first came up.

"No good starting a row 'twixt officers," said he. "Leastwise, not over a dead Portugee swab. Maybe," turning to me, "if you're so damned particular about holding obsequies over him, Mister, you can play sky pilot yourself. That is, if Captain Prout has no objections."

"By Judas, I will," I told him.

If looks could kill I'd have been as dead as the bo'sun from the look the Old Man give me. He was that mad he couldn't speak. But Eastwood said something to him in a low voice, began arguing with him, and I went for'ard.

I ordered a couple of hands aft to

pick up Manuel's body, told the sailmaker to sew him up in an old staysail, and hunted about to find something to put at the bo'sun's feet to carry him down to Davy Jones. All I could find were some links of old anchor chain.

I reckon the crew had seen and heard all that had gone on 'twixt me and the skipper aft, but I just told them the Old Man wouldn't read the service, so I'd attend to it myself.

It was about six bells in the forenoon by the time the body was sewed up and ready. The men lifted the corpse onto a hatch cover. Pulling off their caps, they carried it to the starboard rail where I read the service.

Then the hatch cover was tipped, and poor Manuel slid off and splashed into the sea. The links of chain were pretty light to sink him, what with the air inside the canvas covering, and he went down kind of slowly. The ship being under weigh, he went slipping aft, sinking all the time, and in the clear water we could see him as a sort of pale green shadow, getting smaller and smaller, with bubbles of air coming up like those from a diver's helmet.

WE WERE just barely making steerage way and by eight bells the breeze failed, and it came flat calm with a fog making. Not a thick, greasy pea-soup fog like we have on the Banks or in the Channel, but a thin wispy fog that drifted across the water like smoke. Uneven it was, too. One minute we could see for a couple of miles across the ocean though everything was hid higher than the lower topsail yards. Next minute it would be clear to starboard and thick to port or 'tother way about, or maybe clear for'ard and thick astern or vice-versa.

Tricky weather for navigating, but down there with practically the whole South Atlantic to ourselves there wasn't much chance of running afoul another ship, especially as we weren't making headway enough to keep the logline taut. The sun went down in a bank of murky gray, and when the moon came out, the sea had a sort of ghostly look; black as Jonah's pocket when fog hid the moon, and light as day the next minute with the wisps of fog looking like drifting snow.

I was standing at the port rail close to the mizzen rigging, the mate being below, and the cap'n was pacing the quarter-deck to starboard, when I heard him give a strange choking cry. I swung about and there he stood staring astern with his head stuck out and his eyes ready to pop out of their sockets. The next minute he started running aft drawing his pistol as he went.

Wondering what in thunderation he'd seen, I ran aft on the port side. But he beat me to the taffrail where he stood shouting a string of the worst cuss words I ever heard. Then he up with his pistol, began shooting.

"Damn your soul!" he yelled between shots. "Go back to hell where you belong! Take that, you—"

Then, by glory, I saw what he was firing at. There, surrounded by an unholy greenish light of phosphoresence bobbing up and down in our wake, twisting and turning in the eddies, was a long, shapeless sort of thing that was somehow sort of human-looking at that. The minute I saw it I knew what it was.

It was Manuel!

His body, sewed in canvas, had come back from Davy Jones. Either the chain links had busted through the rotten old sailcloth and let the corpse bob up, or else there hadn't been enough weight to keep it down when it got into a current or maybe sucked into our wake. Whatever the reason, there was the body bobbing along astern just as if Manuel was being towed along by the *Enterprise*.

The first shot from the Old Man's pistol splashed the water close alongside the body, but the second bullet hit it square. It may have been my imagination, but it seemed to me there was a queer sound, something like a groan, came from the corpse when the shot struck it.

At the first report, the man at the wheel turned and looked astern. The next second he let out a fearful yell and releasing the wheel, ran forward as if the devil was at his heels. I jumped for the wheel that was spin-

ning and 'twixt catching the spokes and shouting for the superstitious idiot to come back, I had enough to attend to without watching the bos'ns body, though I heard the cap'n blazing away at it until he emptied his pistol.

Pretty soon the helmsman came crawling back, whiter than a new topsail, and without looking astern took over the wheel. By then there wasn't a sign of the corpse, but the Old Man was still standing at the taffrail, holding his empty gun and looking dazed, his face the color of putty.

AT SOUND of the shooting, Eastwood had come rushing up the companionway, expecting to find a mutiny had broken out, for he had his pistol in his hand. When he saw nothing, he asked the cap'n what he'd been shooting at. The Old Man began to swear frightfully.

"That blankety-blank bo'sun!" he shouted. "Following after us and trying to board us. But by the eternal I settled him. Filled his rotten carcass full of lead, damn his soul!"

Eastwood gave a hard sort of laugh. He wasn't superstitious like the skipper.

"Better come below, sir, and have a shot of rum," he said. "A bit uncanny to see such a sight, but I've seen more than one dead body do the same thing. Nothing supernatural to worry over, Cap'n."

The Old Man was shaking all over and his mouth, usually so hard and cruel, was loose and dribbling as he went below with the mate. He was scared, that was plain, being so superstitious.

Soon as the pair had gone below, two of the men came aft and wanted to know what the shooting was. When I told them they looked mighty uneasy and glanced about into the shadows and stood staring first to port and then to starboard as if expecting to see their dead shipmate appear at any minute. The sailmaker, a wizened old fellow, spoke first.

"It's bad business, sir," he said as solemn as an owl. "Manny's uneasy, and you can lay to that, Mr. Barton. He'll be hangin' about and bringin' bad luck to the ship, sir. But praise God, Mr. Barton, 'tis none of us nor you, sir, what he's after."

"Shut up and go forward," I ordered him. "You're talking like an ass. There's nothing strange about a dead body floating when there isn't enough weight to sink it. We haven't made ten knots since we dropped Manuel over the rail and the current's running faster than we sailed. Anyhow, he's gone for good now. The cap'n's bullets let the air out of the canvas and he'll go to the bottom. You'll never see him again."

Without a word they went forward, but I knew I hadn't changed their opinions any. Sailormen are a superstitious lot, forever looking for omens and most of them in those days believed in spirits and ghosts and apparitions.

At four bells the Old Man came on deck looking about as usual, and I ducked below to get some tobacco. Just as I started back there was a fearsome screech from the deck.

"Mutiny!" I said to myself, and grabbing up my pistol, I went up the companionway in two jumps.

Before I reached the deck I could hear the Old Man's voice and it sounded as if he was being strangled.

"Do—do you see him?" he choked.

Then I heard the helmsman answering. "No, sir, I don't see nothin'."

So the cap'n thought he still saw Manuel's body, while the man at the wheel didn't see. But soon as I reached the deck *I* saw. And, by Judas, I'm telling you, Mister. I felt like a bucket of cold water had been dumped down my back. I could feel the hair rising on my head.

There, by the main rigging, one leg already over the rail was Manuel coming aboard the ship!

I saw him just as plain as I see you now. His clothes were dripping water, there was a big red splotch on the front of his shirt, and his face was a sickly green-white like the belly of a shark.

I'm not a scary man, and up to that minute I'd never believed in ghosts. But when with my own two eyes I saw Manuel's ghost dragging itself over the ship's rail, coming aboard

from out the sea, I felt as if I was being strangled.

THE cap'n was holding fast to the mizzen backstay with one hand and pointing at the ghost with the other. He was groaning as if in mortal pain and his face was the color of mildewed canvas.

The man at the wheel was seeing the ghost, too. Letting go the spokes, he went to his knees, crossing himself and shaking so his teeth chattered. The next second the cap'n let go the backstay, whipped out his pistol, fired at the ghost and fell flat on the deck. I jumped to him, thinking he'd had a stroke, and I pretty near had one myself when I saw the ghost simply fade away like a wisp of fog. The next minute it was gone, and Eastwood came along.

"Look after the cap'n," I yelled at him and ran forward, taking mighty good care to go to starboard and not to port where I'd seen Manuel's spirit a minute before. I was mortally scared, but I'd got my senses back.

"Where the blazes did he go?" I shouted to a bunch of the men.

The sailmaker shook his head and glanced about nervously. "We don't know, sir, but he'll never rest easy till he even scores with the Old Man. Didn't I say he'd bring bad luck to the ship?"

"I don't believe in ghosts," I declared, "but I saw what the cap'n fired at was straddling the port rail by the main rigging."

One of the men laughed, a sort of dry cackling laugh. "What you and the Old Man saw was Manny's ghost, and you can lay to that Mr. Barton, sir."

"Follow me," I ordered grimly, leading the way to the spot where I had seen whatever it was coming in over the port rail.

I jumped back as if I'd seen a coiled cobra there. Plain on the deck planking was a big splotch of blood and a trail of blood and water led to it from the rail!

At sight of this the men turned and ran for the fo'c'sle hatch and fairly tumbled down it, banging the cover shut after them. I headed in the other direction, and never stopped till I was on the quarter-deck. Not a soul was in sight. The helmsman had vanished, gone forward I supposed. Eastwood had managed to get the Old Man below and to his berth where he was clean off his head, babbling and shouting about ghosts and dead men while the mate was telling him he'd had a hallucination or something.

"Mr. Barton, call two men and search the ship," Eastwood shouted up to me. "Go through her from decks to bilges and from stem to stern and find the damned sailor who's been playing ghost."

I knew it wouldn't be any use, for by now I was positive it was no mortal I'd seen. But I managed to rout out some of the men and, lashing the wheel, for not one would come aft, I ordered two of them to search the ship with me. Not one would budge from the forward deck. Though they hadn't seen the ghost, they were so scared they'd have let themselves be shot down rather than move twenty feet aft.

"Don't surprise me that Manny came aboard," declared one man when at last I gave up. "He was murdered and can't rest easy. But he hasn't anything against us so didn't show hisself for'ard. Most likely wants a word with the Old Man."

BY the time I went aft the skipper had gone to sleep, and I guess Eastwood had followed his own advice to the Old Man and taken more than a "tot" of rum, for he was snoring like a grampus on the cabin settee, although 'twas time for his watch on deck. I knew I couldn't sleep if I did turn in, so I stood out his watch on top of my own, pacing up and down the deck.

Long about three bells the skipper came on deck. It was pretty light by then, and he looked liked he'd risen from a sick bed, being pale and pasty and having black rings under his eyes and his lips sort of quivering. For a time he stood staring astern as if half-expecting to see the bo'sun's body still bobbing along in our wake. Then he gave a sort of sigh of relief and swept the horizon, after

which he stepped forward to the break of the poop.

The next second he let out a God-awful yell and stood staring, pop-eyed and shaking, at the deck below. I jumped forward expecting to see Manuel's ghost. It wasn't there but there was something just as uncanny. There, plain on the planking was a big splotch of blood. I couldn't breathe for a second, I was that flabbergasted. I'd seen that splotch of blood mopped up and the deck swabbed as clean as the rest of the deck, yet there is was back again and as fresh and red as if it hadn't been there more than five minutes.

Well, when the men forward saw me and the cap'n staring speechless they came aft to find out what we saw. When they did see it they turned and ran as if the ghost was chasing them.

The Old Man went clean off his head. He whipped out his pistol and began shooting at that blood stain. And every time a bullet hit the deck that damnable red splotch got bigger and bigger before my eyes. By the time the last shot was fired, it covered a spot bigger than the head of a harness cask.

I know, because there wasn't a man aboard who'd go near it, and to cover it up, I had to roll a cask onto it. That didn't hide the whole of it, so I nailed a patch of old canvas over it.

When the skipper had emptied his gun he gave a fearful screech and heaved the pistol over the rail into the sea, fell on his knees and begun babbling prayers. The shooting aroused Eastwood from his sleep, and he came alongside us, kind of wobbly and with bleary eyes. But he was a lot more wobbly when he saw the bloodstained deck, and his eyes fairly bulged. Then he let out a string of cuss words and began damning the Old Man something awful. I don't expect the cap'n even heard him, for he kept right on praying and babbling until suddenly he dropped to the deck, kicking and writhing as if he had a fit.

"Here, help me get the Old Man below," I yelled at the mate.

For a second Eastwood looked dazed, staring at the skipper like he'd never seen him before. Then he quit swearing and helped me lift the Old Man. Together we carried him below. I couldn't wait to see if the skipper came out of his fit, for the ship was yawing and I could hear the sails thrashing and yards buckling in the breeze that was coming up with the sun.

Lucky it was that the wind wasn't strong, or we'd have been in a holy mess aloft. As it was we were aback, and the ship was rolling awful. Sailormen may be scary, but they're never too afraid to man braces or jump to lifts and sheets when there's need of it to save a ship. They worked lively enough when I shouted orders to them.

WE GOT sails trimmed and the *Enterprise* back on her course, and I managed to get two men to the wheel, one not daring to come aft alone. Then I hid the red stain on deck like I've said and, being dog-tired, I stretched out on the bench alongside the skylight. I dared not go below and turn in for fear some other damned thing would go wrong.

The fog lifted with the sun, and when I woke up it was clear weather, the sun shining bright with a ten-knot breeze filling the sails and a crinkly blue sea with little white caps flashing in the sunlight. For a minute I thought I'd been dreaming about the ghost of Manuel—until my eyes fell on that square of canvas I'd nailed to the deck, and I remembered what was under it. I was hungry enough to eat the chafing gear off the main rigging, and after taking a squint aloft and seeing everything was ship-shape, I ducked below to get a cup of coffee and a snack of breakfast.

Eastwood was already at the table, but he wasn't eating anything, just gulping down hot black coffee. He neither looked up nor spoke when I came in. When I asked him how the skipper was, he just jerked his head toward the cap'n's cabin without answering.

"You'd better go on deck soon as you've finished," I said to him. "I'm

about all in, standing watch the whole blessed night long."

"Mind your own damned business," he snarled. But he went up just the same.

When I'd eaten, I took a look into the cap'n's cabin. The Old Man was lying in his berth, his eyes shut, moaning in his sleep.

I turned in and slept like a log till near eight bells when I went on deck to shoot the sun. Everything was shipshape, the mate pacing back and forth and the men at the wheel seeming easy enough. When Eastwood saw me with my sextant, he ducked below and came up with his, and we took sights as usual. But he didn't say a damned word except to holler "eight bells" when the sun crossed the meridian.

The breeze held well until after sundown when it got fitful and puffy, but it was a bright moonlight night, clear as a bell with the sea like a sheet of silver. About two bells, Eastwood came across to where I was standing and spoke to me for the first time since breakfast.

"What's your opinion of all this monkey business, Mr. Barton?" he asked. "I don't know," I told him. "What do you think of it?"

He looked about as if expecting to see Manuel's ghost sneaking up on us. Then, speaking in low tones:

"'Twixt you and me I think the bo'sun has come back to haunt the Old Man," he said. "I've been a damned tough man, but I never killed a man in cold blood the way he killed Manuel."

I had never liked Eastwood, and I remembered the way he'd man-handled the men, and I thought I'd take a good dig at him now.

"Maybe you didn't have a hand in killing Manuel," I said, "but you stood by the Old Man when it came to giving him Christian burial. Maybe Manuel has it in for you on that account."

The mate's face went white as chalk in the moonlight.

"My God, I hadn't thought of that!" he gasped. "Do you think—"

An awful scream from the cabin cut him short. I jumped for the companionway and went down without touching the steps. The door to the skipper's cabin was open, and I dashed for it not knowing what to expect to find. And then as I reached the doorway I run plumb into something I couldn't see. It was soft and squashy and cold—deadly cold—and wet. Yet there wasn't a blessed thing there 'twixt me and the cabin where a night light was still burning inside.

THEN I felt like my legs had given way under me, for the thing I'd struck slid past me and I heard a voice. "'Scuse me, Meester Barton," was whispered in my ear.

It was Manny's voice, and I reeled back against the door casing weak as a frayed yarn, knowing I'd bumped into the bo'sun's ghost. I don't know how long I stood there trying to catch my breath and stop shaking like a to'gallant sail in a squall. A yell from on deck brought me to my senses. Forgetting all about the Old Man, I made for the deck, scared stiff that I'd bump into the ghost again.

The two men at the wheel were chattering like monkeys and the mate was hanging onto a backstay looking like a corpse. But I scarcely noticed him, for hovering just above the port rail, like a cloud of steam, was the ghost. I could see the main shrouds and backstays right through it. It didn't have legs as far as I could see, but the body and head! An awful sight indeed for mortal eyes to see. It was Manuel's form, but somehow terrible.

Then I heard the Old Man's voice, moaning and babbling, just behind me. The next second he passed within three feet of where Eastwood and I stood, but he never so much as turned his head towards us. He was like a man walking in his sleep, his eyes fixed straight ahead. Then before I knew what he was about he was climbing over the poop rail.

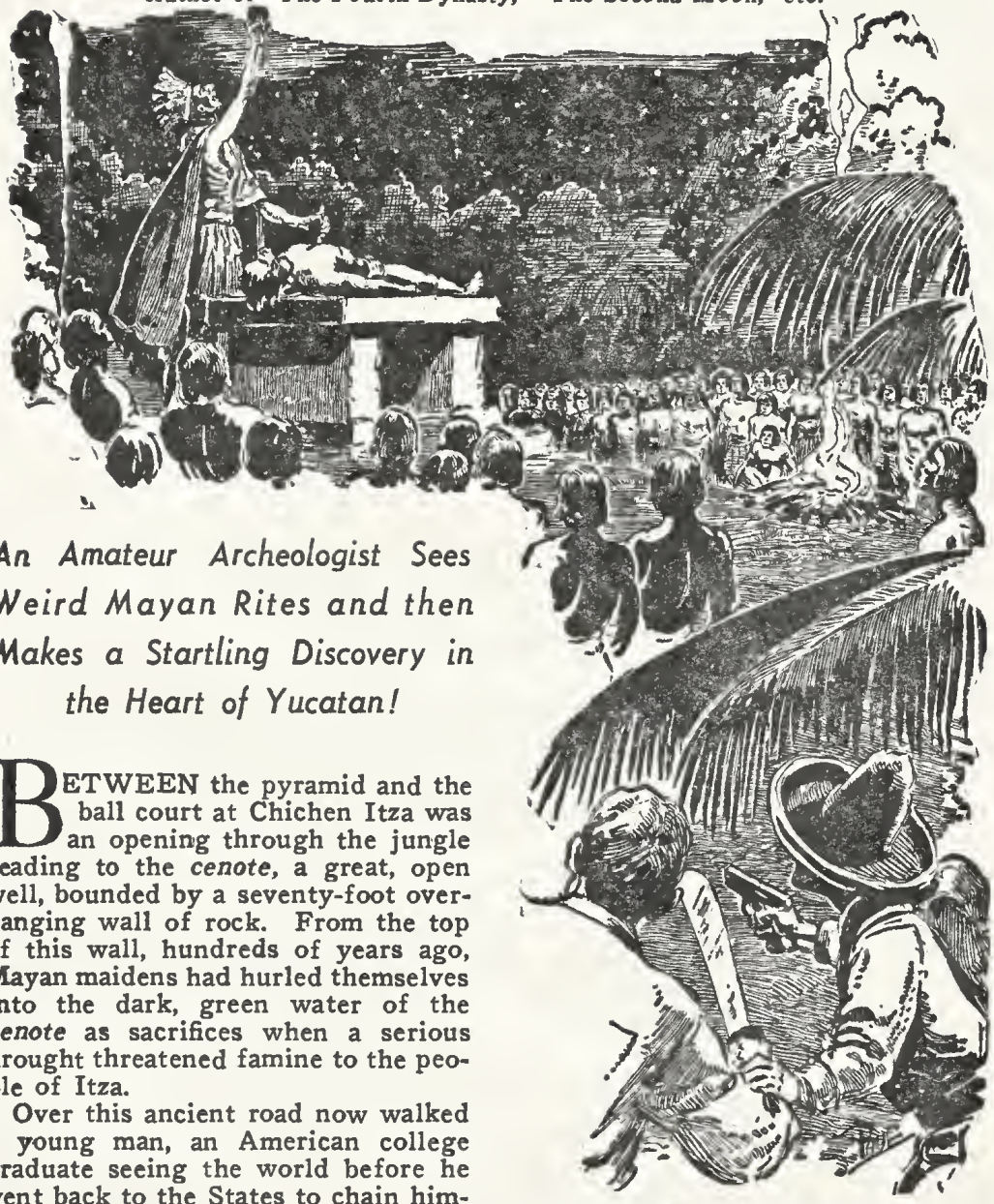
For a second he stood there staring at the awful thing that seemed to be floating away from the ship. The next second the Old Man gave a blood curdling scream and jumped overboard. He struck the water right

(Concluded on page 122)

THE GEIST OF THE JUNGLE

By R. R. WINTERBOTHAM

Author of "The Fourth Dynasty," "The Second Moon," etc.



An Amateur Archeologist Sees Weird Mayan Rites and then Makes a Startling Discovery in the Heart of Yucatan!

BETWEEN the pyramid and the ball court at Chichen Itza was an opening through the jungle leading to the *cenote*, a great, open well, bounded by a seventy-foot overhanging wall of rock. From the top of this wall, hundreds of years ago, Mayan maidens had hurled themselves into the dark, green water of the *cenote* as sacrifices when a serious drought threatened famine to the people of Itza.

Over this ancient road now walked a young man, an American college graduate seeing the world before he went back to the States to chain himself to a lifelong job.

The victim was placed on the stone slab

Once the road to the *cenote* had been paved and bounded by small temples, ranging at the side in the manner of hot-dog stands, for gods had been a highway dissipation of Mayan culture. Now, excepting for those temples which had been restored, the route barely saved itself from the overrunning jungle.

The American, Sam Christopher, was smiling, drawing the heavy, moist, jungle air deep into his lungs and caring about nothing in particular. He was tanned by exposure in the tropics. His hair was straight and black and he wore a native sombrero so that at a distance he might have been taken as a descendant of the men who had built ancient Chichen Itza and who had served her glories.

On his back was a knapsack and fastened to his belt was a water bottle. Thousands of tourists visit Chichen Itza and thousands of them pack knapsacks and slip away, feeling that secrets are still to be exposed in the old ruins and that they shall find the key to the vanished culture. So there was nothing odd about Christopher's solitary jaunt.

As Sam Christopher walked the jungle road, a ray of sunlight, filtering through the trees fell on the ground near the edge of the jungle to his right. The young man's pace slackened. He halted and stooped to examine the ground. A ridge of earth ran back into the dense vegetation.

HE KICKED the earth curiously with his boot heel. He pushed away decaying vegetation and exposed a dirty, square-cut stone.

He had been eager to discover something, but now that he had uncovered a rock shaped by tools, a queer and perplexed expression crossed his face. For a moment the veneer of civilization was wiped away. Sam Christopher, amateur archeologist, the product of an American university, became a superstitious savage, hesitating in awe before something he could not understand.

There was nothing he could see, except an ancient paving brick. But he was not sure his eyes were seeing this brick. He touched the object. He could feel it, yet his senses doubted the touch. The smell of damp, earth-covered stone was there, yet it wasn't, and to his ears, more mystifying than all other manifestations, was the muffled thrumming noise, not loud but plain, like the beat of drums and the hoarse honk of conch-shell trumpets.

For a single instant the world seemed to freeze in its tracks. Then a snap of a twig behind him broke the illusion. The puzzled frown faded from Sam Christopher's face and the rustling of the modern jungle seemed to drown out the things he heard.

"Find something, young man?" came a voice from behind.

Sam turned with a startled jump. He saw a huge, gruff-looking American, wearing a dirty sun helmet and looking like a prop in a movie jungle picture. The stranger's eyes were squinting at the stone Sam Christopher had uncovered.

"Yes," Christopher replied, his voice breaking queerly. "This brick—there is something funny about it! Notice anything?"

The man's eyes dropped to the brick, rested there a moment, and then traveled along the ridge of ground that ran into the jungle. The stranger glanced again at Sam.

"Lord, you're a white man, aren't you?" he said. "I thought you were a Mex in that hat—you're brown as one. Better be careful about too much sun—"

He broke off and glanced back at the stone.

"It doesn't seem real, does it?" asked Sam.

The big man shook his head.

"It's the shape," he said finally. "The Mayans were wizards at optical illusion. You know, I presume, how the Greeks bulged their columns at the middle to create the optical illusion of straightness? Well, these redskins had a lot of ideas like that. The steps up the pyramid are wider at the top, so that they look the same width all the way up to a man at the bottom. There's something like that the matter with that stone. It's been carved so that it looks like it isn't real."

Sam Christopher nodded as if the explanation satisfied him. But it didn't. There was the feel of the thing, the smell, and that thumping of drums.

"You're an archeologist, aren't you?" he asked the big stranger.

"I'm something of the sort," replied the other with a laugh. "I'm Murdock Duncan, Ph.D. I've done a little research on the Holactun initial series and I've made some discoveries regarding the invasion of Yucatan along the west coast in 764 A.D. I haven't done much, but enough to make a slight reputation. And now I'm back again to delve some more."

Sam took the extended hand and introduced himself.

"It's strange about this ridge, where you found the stone," Duncan went on. "Every authority on Mayan culture, besides thousands of tourists, have walked here and none have noticed it. Looks to me, Christopher, as though you've made a discovery!"

SAM could have puffed out his chest, but he didn't, for he heard the roar of drums again—louder now, like thunder.

"Hear that?" Sam's voice was like a whisper.

Duncan grinned and looked overhead. He raised his hand and pointed to the sky. There, floating over the jungle, was a tri-motored plane.

"The mail plane for Belize, British Honduras," he explained with a chuckle.

Sam laughed, too, a bit sheepishly. There was something in the environment that gave a man a sense of awe. His vision had been distorted by the shape of the brick and his ears, not expecting the hum of an airplane motor above the primitive jungle, had done the rest. The odor and the queer feel of the stone could be laid to nerves.

"Just the same," went on Duncan, "I think we could do a little profitable investigating. Wait here until I get the tools—"

Without waiting for Sam to reply, Duncan darted briskly down the road. Alone, once more, Sam felt uneasy. Each rustle of the trees, every sound of the forest seemed laden with menace.

"Nerves!" muttered Sam, as he lit a cigarette. Nevertheless, he was glad when Duncan reappeared, carrying a machete.

"I always keep one of these things handy in case I want to peek behind the scenery," explained the archeologist. "Got a gun?"

Sam pulled a small-caliber automatic from his pocket. "I've a couple of extra clips, too," he informed Duncan.

"Pop gun!" snorted Duncan depreciatingly. "But it'll do for snakes. I doubt if we'll see anything larger."

Duncan raised the machete and started to work on the jungle. The broad blade flashed and cut into the brush.

"Come on," he called, stepping through the opening.

Sam followed uncertainly. After a few minutes he took his turn with the machete, cutting, slashing, tearing his way into the jungle. Always at their feet was that mound of earth, running straight as an arrow through the trees.

As Sam worked he realized that his whole body was tense and alert. He seemed to be listening for something. Then, as Duncan worked, each slash of the long, flat knife startled Sam. Somehow it did not sound as it should. The jungle seemed to deaden the noise, holding it so that it could not escape. It was intensely hot and deathly quiet.

A monkey screamed in the forest, and Sam almost jumped out of his boots.

They waded through brush for hours, it seemed. It was cut, step, hack; cut, step, hack. Sam's back ached as he sweated and toiled in the steamy growths. They were almost being devoured by insects, but Duncan would not slow down. He was a bloodhound on the scent of something big.

"Where does it lead to?" asked Sam, looking at the ridge. Ahead of them a tree had sprouted in the center of the ridge, turning up a score of those queer stones that fooled the eyes.

"It's an old road," replied Duncan. "It may go for miles."

Sam gritted his teeth and plunged on. It was his discovery and he was going to stick with it. If Sam didn't, he knew that Duncan was ready to follow the road until he came to the ocean if necessary. Sam wasn't going to let Duncan hog the credit.

Trees now grew frequently in the middle of the ridge, turning up the paving like a plow share. It looked as if the jungle were determined to erase all trace of man.

Suddenly Duncan uttered a shout. Ahead of them, entwined by vines, was a dirty, grayish stone. A monument in the middle of the jungle.

"A stela!" exclaimed the archeologist.

A FEW whacks with the knife brought them close. It was covered with checkered glyphs. Only about four feet of the stone now stood above the surface. There was no telling how much of it lay buried beneath the decaying vegetation at their feet. Vines had pulled it at a forward angle, but the stone had been planted firmly and it showed no signs of toppling.

While Duncan jotted down the inscription in his notebook, Sam unfolded a canvas shelter that had formed a part of his pack. The forest was growing dark rapidly and the creepy sounds of night swirled through the trees. Duncan was working rapidly, showing familiarity with the symbols on the stone.

"It's a new series," said Duncan, squatting down beside the fire Sam had built. "I'll have to do a lot of deciphering later, but I know it's very old. The date is before any other stela on record—before the Christian era."

"You mean it's older than the stela at Uaxactun? That one's the oldest—"

"At least five hundred years older, and that would put it before the Tuxtla statuette," declared Duncan. "Don't ask me to explain Mayan timekeeping. It's a complicated quadruple check system, but it's accurate—so accurate that the Mayans could distinguish without duplication any given day in three hundred and seventy thousand years! Our own calendar will require several revisions before that time has slipped by."

Far off to the right a cougar howled. Monkeys chattered and the jungle came to life in the deepening night. Sam shuddered.

"Creepy, isn't it?" he muttered.

His eyes were staring past the stela. Light from the fire flickered in the trees. At times he saw the eyes of small animals gleaming like opals in the darkness. And an air of strangeness settled over everything—including the big figure of Murdock Duncan.

Sam wished he would see something. He was not afraid of a tangible enemy. But there was something—a menace he could not see that had dogged his tracks since morning, since the moment he had swung his heel against the end of the ridge.

Suddenly his eyes caught sight of a movement in the darkness. There was no definite form. Rather, it was a shadow where a shadow should not have been. It floated in the darkness at the edge of the farthest light from the fire.

"Look!" His hand clenched Duncan's arm, and he rubbed his eyes.

"It's just a shadow!"

"It is—but look again! It floats through the trees. It's circling the fire!"

Sam was watching the stela, rooted in the ground, enmeshed by jungle vines. The stela was rising upward.

There was a crack, like a rifle shot. Then another. Two giant trees, one on each side of the stela, swayed and began falling away from each other.

The stela continued to rise. Sam grabbed Duncan's arm and dragged him away. Then with a crash the stela fell face downward across the spot where the two men had been sitting.

For a moment neither man spoke. The cougar howled in the forest, a note of disappointment seemed in his voice. Birds of the night fluttered in the trees, and animals scampered away at the sound of the crash.

DUNCAN trained his flashlight on the stela.

"Strange that two trees should fall at the same time," he muttered. "The

weight of the falling trees pulled the stela up from the ground. Those vines acted like ropes."

"It wasn't a coincidence," said Sam unsteadily. "There's something in this jungle that doesn't want us here!"

"The jungle itself always resents intrusion," murmured the older archeologist.

"Don't you think there's something weird here, Duncan? Can't you *feel* the things I feel? Lord, man, are you made of stone?"

Duncan glanced at the young American.

"Don't be a fool, Sam," he replied. "There're no ghosts in this jungle or anywhere else! The Mayan gods are dead. If we didn't know it we could look at that monument to the dead gods at San Felipe. Mortals don't honor their gods often by erecting tombstones over them when they're dead, but these Mayans are a funny race—"

"But it's so strange!" declared Sam. "It is as if some strange force is fighting us back—keeping us from things we shouldn't know!"

"Nature itself is a weird, eerie, titanic thing," replied Duncan in a sonorous voice. "There are things in the jungle you don't find anywhere else."

"Let's go back!" whispered Sam. "We can come here tomorrow, when it's day!"

As he spoke there was a sound in the jungle. It came as a hollow boom. It was followed by another and another thumping, echoing reverberation, as if a giant tom-tom were assembling all nature to a meeting.

Duncan did not answer, and Sam Christopher knew that it was too late now to turn back. The drum was calling, and its voice said war!

Duncan strode to a tree. He jerked his machete from the limb where he had embedded it while studying the stela. Sam pulled his automatic from his pocket and examined the clip.

Then Duncan whistled low as he switched his flashlight on the hole in the jungle once blocked by the stela.

Beyond was a clear space, a path which might have been made by animals or by man. It was clear and straight, and it followed the ridge of the old Mayan road. Duncan led the way.

Instinctively Sam followed. The thumping sounded at regular intervals. Then, in the distance they saw the eerie gleam of a light.

Their progress was wary, and the path lay uphill. Far ahead the light became a triangle, and then it separated into three lights, which could be discerned as flickering bonfires at the top of a mound of earth. Now Sam could see moving, ghostlike figures.

"Mayans?" he asked incredulously.

"Probably Indians, celebrating Mayan rites," replied Duncan. "Not long ago a colleague of mine found priests in Guatemala keeping the old Maya calendar with red seeds. The Mayans and their gods may be dead, but their culture—as old as our own—didn't pass with the arrival of a few Spaniards."

They reached the edge of a clearing. There was no sign of an ax or a machete, yet here the invincible jungle had been held back. On all sides were gleaming buildings and shadowy forms of half-naked Indians.

BUT the people were silent!

The three bonfires formed a triangle about a stone altar, behind which stood a score of Indians, silent, motionless and looking like statues in the half-light. Then the giant drum sounded, almost beneath the feet of the two white men.

"The drumming!" gasped Sam Christopher.

"I can explain that, at least," said Duncan. "Yucatan is a vast, limestone plain through which water percolates rapidly. That's why there are so few running streams here. Breaches in the limestone occur at several places forming the wells or *cenotes,* including the two large ones at Chichen Itza. That's what the name means: 'Mouth of the Wells of the Itzas.' The booming comes from the wells—and changes in atmospheric pressure might cause it."

"But it seems to call a person!"

"Pure imagination!" Duncan said gruffly. "Have you noticed how every-

thing you have thought so strange admits a natural explanation—the shape of the paving stones, the drums booming, the fall of the stela—"

"I'm not sure of anything," replied Sam. "You can call it natural phenomena, nerves, or what you please —but there is something on that pyramid that is either human or unhuman!"

As Sam spoke a new figure appeared on the summit of the mound. He was tall in comparison with the others and he wore a blood-red robe. Eight of the Indians detached themselves from the throng and suddenly seized another of their number.

Their movements were silent and ghostlike. The only sound was the hollow booming of the *cenote*.

The victim was picked up bodily by the others. Two Indians held each of his struggling limbs and the man was carried toward the altar.

Sam's face was white and strained. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. He sensed what was coming.

The red-robed priest raised his arm toward the stars; his movements were stealthy, gliding. A long, stone knife seemed to materialize in his hand. He shook his head and the hood of the red cape fell back, revealing long, snow white hair growing from a fleshless skull.

"Oh, my God!" groaned Sam. "You think we imagine this?"

Duncan did not reply. He moistened his lips. The strain was showing on him.

Another Indian carried a jar of burning copal to the priest, who placed it beside the altar. A second later the victim was laid on the slab of stone. The knife raised once more to the stars and flashed downward.

The only sound was the groan that came from Sam's lips.

The priest thrust the knife into the flesh, turning aside the flesh with a twist. His long, fleshless arm reached into the opening and gave a quick jerk. Then the priest pulled forth a still pulsating heart and held it aloft.

Sam saw the lips of the Indians move, but he heard only the drumming reverberation of the *cenote*.

"It isn't real!" whispered Sam aloud. "It can't be real!"

Duncan made no answer. Sam could not tear his fascinated gaze from the scene to look at his companion.

The heart was dropped into the jar of burning copal, and the priest hurled the dead man's body down the steps of the pyramid. The deep tone gurgled and drummed, and in the jungle a cougar wailed.

THEN the priest turned slowly and pointed his bloody dagger at the spot from which the two white men watched. The eight Indians filed down the pyramid steps toward the place. And still there was no sound.

"Use your machete, Duncan! They are coming!" cried the young American. "They *are* real!"

In a moment Sam was cool. He rose to his feet. Here was something to fight; something he could see. He faced Duncan. In spite of the older man's bulk, in spite of his huge form, Duncan seemed helpless as a babe. He seemed thinner and the lines of his face were drawn.

"Explain these renegade red devils!" he cried, "but do it with your machete."

"You don't understand!" cried Duncan. "Not yet."

His voice was drowned by the crash of Sam's automatic. The flame spat from the gun in the direction of the approaching Indians. It spoke again and again, but the advancing figures did not hesitate.

Sam emptied the clip and replaced it with another. Still the figures advanced.

"They're not human!" said Sam. "Explain them away, Duncan!"

Duncan screamed as the drum of the Itza well mocked them both.

Sam's useless gun slipped from his fingers. He had fired at point-blank range at the eight crouching figures, and the human forms had not even hesitated. Stooping, Sam picked up the other's machete. He was no longer afraid. He might be a poor shot, but he could slash and stab.

The jungle, for an instant, grew quiet as death. The *cenote* tolled once. Then it was quiet again. Faintly

from the air came a new sound. It grew louder. It came as a beating rumble, like the roll of many tom-toms. It was eerie, unearthly and out of place in the jungle. It was the sound of churning machinery of civilization!

The phantomlike advance of the figures slackened. The eight Indians halted and seemed to quiver. The roar became louder and louder, rumbling like an approaching storm. The eight Indians were staring upward. Overhead floating above the tops of the trees were red and green lights.

"The night plane from Belize!" cried Duncan.

Sam shouted. He picked up his gun, discarding the machete. He fired into the air. But the plane floated serenely on across the clearing. Its lights disappeared and the noise of its motors grew faint in the distance.

"Gone!" whispered Sam.

He looked about him. The fires on the pyramid had grown dim. Now they went out, and far away in the east appeared the first flush of dawn. The figures of the Mayans and the red-robed, fleshless priest vanished like smoke.

DUNCAN sank back on the ground with a groan.

"I suppose," said Sam, "it was a hallucination?"

Duncan rocked back and forth. He was a changed man.

"It wasn't a ghost gathering, Sam! Remember that!" he said.

"What d'you mean?" demanded the youth. "We saw something that did not exist. We were scared to death! We saw fires that never burned!" Sam paused. "And a murderous sacrifice that never—"

"Ah, but you're wrong! Those things did occur. Not just now, but—" He stopped while the *cenote* gurgled and boomed. "You hear that?"

Again came the deep-throated, hollow noise. It taunted the fears of the young American.

"I hope I can get far enough away so that I'll never hear it again!" Sam cried.

Duncan smiled.

"It's been doing that for centuries, Sam. Once it accompanied many sacrifices, just as we thought we saw here tonight! There is really nothing very tangible to a noise except when we hear it."

"I suppose it hypnotized us, made us believe we were seeing things we didn't see?"

Duncan shook his head. He dusted the dead leaves from his clothing and led the way toward the pyramid. Already it was daylight. Now the structure appeared only as a mound of vegetation-covered dirt. The steps, down which the victim of the sacrifice had tumbled, had disappeared. Other little mounds had replaced the small, white temples that had gleamed in the light of the fire around the pyramid.

Sam, who had stood bravely before the advance of the eight ghostlike warriors of Itza, trembled in the morning light. Duncan, who had exhibited funk a short time before, now was cool.

"It might have been a sort of suggestion," said Duncan, "but not the usual form of hypnotism you see in vaudeville or in psychology classrooms. It was the spirit—the geist of the jungle. Remember, Sam, you're walking where no living white man has ever walked before—where no Mayan has walked for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. During that time the last memory of the jungle was one of bloody human sacrifice. The jungle is a living thing, Sam. It is murderous to everything, even itself. For centuries the jungle fought the Mayans. This was a battleground!"

They labored up the disintegrated steps of the pyramid. There on top they saw three places for the sacrificial fires, but the rains had washed away the charred ashes centuries ago. The altar stood white as snow on top. It was the only clean thing about the place.

"The only Mayan wars of consequence were those against the relentless jungle," went on Murdock Duncan. "The cruel human sacrifices the ancient Mayans made were, supposedly, to gain advantage in this war—to appease the gods so that rain would fall when needed, or that crops would

not be rooted out by weeds of the jungle. I do not refer to the century and one-half of civil war which ended about fourteen sixty, bringing the country to the verge of ruin, a devastation which was completed with the coming of the Spanish conquistadors.

"Our path along the old Mayan road through the jungle permitted us to see marks of the struggle against the jungle. Subconsciously our eyes of the mind took in the fragments of scenes of conflict. As for the scene we just witnessed atop this pyramid, it may have been a psychic or telepathic echo from the distant past that impinged on our—"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Sam Christopher incredulously.

"Impossible!" repeated Duncan, raising his heavy eyebrows and staring at his companion peculiarly. "When you grow older, my young friend, a great many things which are inexplicable and which you so impatiently label today as impossible, you will be quite ready to accept as natural phenomena which you simply do not comprehend."

"You mean you didn't believe your own logical explanations about the paving stones, the falling stela, and the booming of the *cenote?*" demanded Christopher.

Duncan shrugged. "They were logical. Accept them if you like. But why not accept the psychic theory for the ancient Mayan sacrificial rites we witnessed here?"

CHRISTOPHER was startled.

"You say that? You, a hard-headed archeologist, a hard-boiled scientist?" The young American stared at his companion. "Didn't you see they were modern descendants of the ancient Mayas, carrying on their bloody rites?"

"Were they?" asked Duncan softly. "You could not kill them with your modern weapon. Yet they did not hurt us. They faded away with the coming of dawn—at the sound of the airplane. And where is the evidence of their recent presence here? Show me."

"You are afraid of—of ghosts?" queried the young college man. "And you a student of Mayan civilization? By the way, when did you last explore here in Yucatan?"

"Exactly ten years ago," replied Duncan evenly. "In nineteen thirty—the year I was awarded the archeological medal by the Academy of Arts and Sciences."

Sam Christopher was impressed in spite of himself. He turned away, his eyes exploring the top of the mound. He took several steps and dropped on his knees to examine the crumbling remains of the ancient altar. Then he uttered an exclamation.

There on the flat top of the stone was a splotch of something rusty brown.

"Something or somebody did die here," he cried in surprise. "It wasn't last night, and it wasn't a hundred or a thousand years ago, either."

There was no response from Duncan, and Christopher looked around. He started violently. Murdock Duncan had completely vanished.

Sam Christopher seized with an unaccountable trembling, arose and stepped forward. He stumbled over something in the weeds at the end of the altar. He looked down.

It was a pile of bones—a human skeleton clad in the moldering rags of white man's khaki breeches and boots. Imbedded in the breast about where the heart had once been was a machete. Not a rusted or weatherbeaten knife, but the machete Duncan had supplied to hack the way through the jungle yesterday afternoon!

Sam Christopher wanted to run, but a deadly fascination held him rooted to the spot. The dull glitter of a watch chain at the belt of the decaying breeches compelled his attention. Slowly, his hands shaking as though with palsy, he drew from the rotting pocket a gold watch and a watch-charm that was a medallion. He examined the second object.

It was a medal award from the Academy of Arts and Sciences. Turning it over, Sam deciphered the engraving on the back side.

To Murdock Duncan, Ph. D.
June 12, 1930

Sam Christopher took the shakes, despite the bright morning sunlight.

(Concluded on page 123)

THE LIGHT MUST BURN

By CAPT. GEORGE J. RAWLINS

Author of "Twenty Drops of Blood," "The Ghost of Galena Mine," etc.

JOHN DERRINGER climbed slowly down the spiral stairs of Devil's Reef Lighthouse. The howling wind outside echoed hollowly in the iron cylinder that housed the stairway. He could feel the slight sway of the sturdy steel tower, could feel it shudder under the lash of the storm. For forty hours the storm had raged, and this was going to be a night even worse than the last—but Derringer grinned maliciously at the thought. It suited his purpose. . . .

He entered the kitchen where his superior, old man Howard, was getting supper. Howard looked up and said something, but a deluge of sea spray driving against the outside walls drowned out his words. Derringer nodded. He knew Bill Howard was inquiring about the light. After thirty years of service the old fool

While Storm Rages, an Eerie Drama Is Enacted within the Devil's Reef Lighthouse!

Derringer raised the wrench as Howard climbed upward

was as jittery about his light as a young mother with her first born!

Derringer went into the engine room and threw the switch that started the light. He glanced out through one of the storm ports. Not yet dark enough to see the flashes reflected on the foam streaked waters.

An outside iron door clanged. That was like the old man—damn him—couldn't take his assistant's word for anything! He'd gone out in the storm where he could look up into a little mirror like the rear-view mirror in an automobile, fastened to the top rail far above. There he could see the light and count its five flashes. . . .

Well, the old man hadn't slept since the storm started and at his age it was beginning to tell on him. Tonight he'd be on duty until twelve. After that it was Derringer's trick and maybe the old man would sleep. He'd better!

John Derringer really had nothing against Bill Howard except that the old man unconsciously stood in the way of the satisfaction of an all-consuming hate against a certain Captain Carter, master of the freighter *Kilworth Castle*.

Derringer had been mate aboard the *Kilworth Castle* until Carter beached him for insubordination. Carter's influence was such that Derringer was unable to obtain another berth at sea. In the lonely lighthouse service he had brooded much on this presumed injustice. The thirst for vengeance became a passion. The passion grew into a mania. . . .

Now, tonight, was the time of his opportunity. If Bill Howard would act like a sensible man and sleep while off duty from midnight till morning, all would go well with his plans. If not—

After supper Derringer went to bed, but not to sleep. Nor was it the wail of the wind that kept him awake. He could see himself again as mate on the bridge of the *Kilworth Castle,* could see her out there in open ocean plowing her way through storm and darkness, making port tonight on her regularly scheduled run in spite of wind or weather.

That schedule, regular as clockwork down almost to the minute, was a hobby of Carter's. A vision of Captain Carter arose before him and hate ran like acid through his veins dispelling all thoughts of sleep.

DERRINGER relieved Bill Howard at midnight. He signed the duty book, inspected the beacon and the power plant. He knew the old man would wait to see that done—never trusted anybody with his precious light!

He followed Howard into the bunk room.

"Why don't you take a rest?" he shouted above the roar of the storm.

Howard shook his graying head. "Like to be standing-by on a night like this, John. Just got five more days to go and I ain't taking any risks. The light must burn!"

"The light must burn!" Derringer had heard that until he was sick of it. He knew Howard's story by heart. For thirty years Bill Howard had tended Devil's Reef Light and never once had it failed. Five days more and he would retire from the service. He was taking no chance of a subordinate's possible carelessness spoiling his proud record at a time like this.

"You're dead on your feet, man," insisted Derringer. "There's nothing to do! The barometer's still falling and we may have trouble later. You owe it to the light to keep yourself in condition."

It took clever persuading. Derringer promised to call him if the slightest thing went wrong and finally Howard sprawled across his bunk. As Derringer left the room he smiled to himself at the old man's final admonition:

"The light must burn!"

Derringer went to the storeroom and with trembling fingers cut a two-foot square of canvas. The storeroom was on the northeast side, and here the wind screamed loudest. It seemed that the fiends of the storm approved what he was about to do.

He climbed the steep spiral stairs to the glass-walled room that housed the light. He stared to the north through rain-drenched windows toward Sand Point Light across the

ship channel. On clear nights one could pick up its signal from this elevation — four short flashes every twenty seconds.

Incoming ships must pass between the lighthouses, taking Sand Point on the starboard and Devil's Reef on the port side. With tonight's low visibility, a ship entering the channel could not hope to see both lights at once—it would have to hug one or the other.

Derringer looked eastward into open ocean. Again total darkness, but somewhere out there the *Kilworth Castle* was steadily steaming closer. Derringer grinned and shifted his gaze into the inky blackness south of Devil's Point. He could see nothing, but there he knew the sea was a boiling witch's cauldron over the treacherous rocks of Graveyard Shoals!

JUST above his head rotated the light—that precious light which the old man worshipped. Around its brilliant central lamp the octagonal lens-frame slowly revolved. The frame had a lens port in each of its eight sides. Three of the ports were covered with metal shields. The remaining five contained lenses sending out focused light beams. Rotating regularly, the light identified itself—five short flashes in a twenty second period. Just beyond the frame on the south side of the light stood a stationary plate of colored glass. As the beams swept through it they turned a gory red, warning ships in that direction away from the dangerous Graveyard Shoals.

Derringer looked at his watch. It was time.

Deftly he hung the square of canvas over one of the lenses, cutting off its beam of light. The beacon now flashed four in twenty—the same as Sand Point! He took a monkey wrench from the tool box, removed the plate of red glass from its frame. Clear white flashes, with no hint of warning, now played over the danger area of Graveyard Shoals!

Derringer stood back and contemplated his work, indulged in a demented chuckle. He felt that he was one with the fiends of the storm that howled outside. That wail of the wind like the shriek of a banshee was a call to comradeship in the legions of darkness which held high revelry over the frightened sea. . . .

In his mind's eye he could see the *Kilworth Castle,* Captain Carter on her bridge. Coming in from the southeast, she habitually picked up Devil's Reef on her port bow as her first landmark. She usually sighted it at this hour, and she would be on schedule—he could depend on that. Carter boasted of keeping to schedule in spite of hell and hurricanes!

Derringer knew Carter could take no observations during the storm. For at least thirty hours he must have been sailing by dead reckoning, unable to fix his position. So, when he sighted those four flashes, he would wrongly identify the light as Sand Point and turn shoreward to pass south of it. Actually, he would be passing south of Devil's Reef—a course which would pile him head-on into that seething Hell of Graveyard Shoals!

Maniacal light glittered in Derringer's eyes. A Satanic smile twisted his lips awry. . . . Then, above the boom of the wind drumming against the tower he heard his name called! Startled, he whirled around, looked down. Howard, wild-eyed and perplexed, was standing at the foot of the stairs, preparing to mount. He was breathing heavily, Derringer could see, as if in angry excitement.

"Derringer!" he called. "The light! What's wrong with the flashes?"

Caught red-handed, Derringer knew he was trapped. His grip tightened on the monkey-wrench still held in his hand. Howard was coming up. Derringer held the wrench in readiness. . . .

There he was now, looming up at the top of the stairs. A few steps more, and Derringer would swing into action. He raised the wrench, his face grim and hard.

The old man's white face was staring at him, horrified. Then, as Derringer stepped forward to bring the wrench down, Howard's body receded, and he was tumbling and rolling down the long steep spiral to the bottom.

Derringer dropped the wrench. Mo-

mentary panic seized him. He had not actually killed the old man, although he had meant to. Nevertheless, he was responsible for the fall. But, he thought, as he hurried down the stairs to where Howard lay, a crumpled mass, who could put the blame on him? At daylight, he could return the light to normal, as he'd intended, and nothing could be proved against him. The old man's death would simply appear to be an accident.

He bent over the body, felt the pulse. Yes, Howard was dead, all right—the pulse wasn't beating. He dragged the body into the bunk room and hurried out quickly.

Derringer strode into the kitchen, gulped down a cup of tepid coffee direct from the pot. Tough luck he had no liquor. He could have used it. But his nerves felt steadier as he thought of the outcome of his scheme.

By daylight his account with Captain Carter would be settled! He chuckled at the thought and the wind laughed with him. Even now the *Kilworth Castle* might be breaking up in those treacherous waters.

He tried to visualize it. The despot, Carter, on the bridge, coming in under full steam defying the elements. The sudden shout of the bow watch: "Breakers ahead, Sir!" Carter's heavy hand flying to the engine room telegraph, the jangle of bells as he hauled back the lever to full-speed astern. The premonitory shudder of the ship under reversed power. The overweening Carter's dismay as she ripped and crunched into the rocks! That northeast wind would swing her broadside leaving the braggart helpless, rolling his ship on her beam ends across the slavering fangs of the shoal. The radio would crackle, he would put up flares—if there was time! Derringer laughed a mirthless cackle. That was too good! The arrogant Carter begging, pleading for help!

The storm increased to hurricane intensity. Its howlings rose to a steady deafening roar which throbbed in Derringer's ears like the war drums of hell. The entire lighthouse trembled down to its bed-rock foundations. Rain water trickled down the walls from opened seams. Sea water spurted through the planking of the floor. A boulder hurled high by the wild surf crashed through the platform outside the door.

Derringer caught the crash of splintering timber and began to wonder if the steel doors would hold. Again he inspected their cross-bar fastenings.

He was suddenly immersed in darkness. He fought for self-control while his eyes became accustomed to the blackness. The rain seeping through the walls must have shorted the lighting circuit. . . . A ghostly whiteness outside came and went, dimly illuminating the interior through the plate glass storm ports. . . . Ah, the beacon was still in operation! Its heavily insulated cables were impervious to sea and rain!

THE beacon flashes came and went. Fascinated, Derringer watched, subconsciously spacing the intervals between the rotating beams of the beacon. Through habit he counted as the swinging arms of light cast their pale reflected glow through the room. One—two—three—four—five. Then the long interval of darkness completing the twenty second period. His imagination tricked him and he wondered what the corpse was doing while the room was shrouded in blackness. Again the flashes came, again the dead face was illumined. One—two—three—four—five!

He started violently. *Five!* Only on the second count did that fifth flash register on his addled brain—But he had darkened that fifth flash—had covered the fifth lens with canvas!

He stumbled in his mad flight. In the kitchen he groped his way to the storm port looking southward over Graveyard Shoals. . . .

No mistaking his count of the flashes now. There were five of them! And as the beams swung over the Shoals they turned—*red!*

He mounted the spiral stairs in the tower by the faint light that trickled down from the beacon above. How could his plans have gone so far astray? The canvas cover might have fallen from the lens by accident, but the red glass couldn't get back in

place by itself! A vague foreboding growing stronger with every step seemed to hold him back—to warn him away from some unknown horror! But Derringer was made of determined stuff. He refused to believe in things intangible. Steadily he mounted the stairs.

He paused on the beacon platform. There lay the monkey wrench where he had dropped it. Beside it lay the square of canvas, crumpled and torn as if ripped from its fastenings and hurled to the floor. The red glass danger signal had been replaced in its iron bracket. Devil's Reef Light was functioning perfectly! Who had done it? Howard? Howard wasn't dead then. He had risen from his bunk and come up to tend the light! But that couldn't be. There had been no pulse-beat—or could he have been mistaken?

IN an unreasoning frenzy of frustration Derringer reached for the monkey wrench. He would smash that red glass! He would break out that fifth lens leaving the beam unfocused and dim.

He refused to be thwarted in his vengeance on Carter. No power, living or dead—

But his hand failed to grasp the wrench. Unseen fingers like cold steel seemed to close about his wrist. Fright gripped him. He had been right—Howard wasn't dead. He struggled vainly to free himself. The unseen took form—rough, wrinkled, old. It was Howard's hand.

In the darkness then, mournful as a fog-wrapped buoy's bell, Derringer heard the words:

"The light must burn!"

Then he was falling, falling through darkness, down the steep spiral stairs. . . . The storm howled on. The beacon ticked off its flashes as inexorably as fate. The light was burning. . . .

Four days later the lighthouse tender, *Spindrift*, danced across sparkling waters. Brilliant sun and a mild breeze had followed the storm, but outside the harbor's shelter a heavy sea still ran. As the sturdy little ship hove-to off Devil's Reef Light, Assistant Lighthouse Keeper MacElroy joined the lighthouse inspector on deck.

"Well, MacElroy," said the inspector, "this is the last time you'll relieve old Bill Howard. His retirement papers are waiting for him when he gets back to headquarters."

They climbed into the dinghy.

"We need more like him," continued the inspector. "Hasn't had a light failure in all his thirty years. The *Kilworth Castle* came into port at the height of that last storm. Only a fool like Carter would have tried it. And Carter reported Devil's Reef Light okay. And after that it went right on functioning night after night as if there hadn't been any storm. Howard just takes it in his stride."

The dinghy threaded its precarious way to the lee side of the desolate rock.

"Wonder why they're not out to meet us?" speculated MacElroy, as they eyed the lonely lighthouse.

The sense of mystery deepened when they found the storm doors bolted from within, and no response to their halloos. Tools were sent for, a door pried open. Horror piled upon horror as they found first the body of Howard in his bunk and then the body of Derringer at the foot of the stairs in the tower.

The inspector took charge of the medical examination sending MacElroy to look over the power plant and beacon.

"These men have been dead for several days," he said in grave wonderment when MacElroy rejoined him. "Derringer appears to have met death by a fall. Probably groggy and tired out from doing double duty. Howard appears to have fallen too, but not down the stairs. Look there—he was about to ascend the stairs—he must have had a heart attack, and he fell, striking his head glancingly against the iron rail. There's a spot of blood and a couple of clinging hairs to mark where his head struck. But that didn't kill him. What happened was that his heart stopped and he fell, striking his head against the rail. The laceration of his scalp bears this out—"

"But the light has burned regularly

(Concluded on page 123)

HOUSE OF THE GRIFFIN

By WILL GARTH

Author of "Sea Vision," "Double Ring," etc.

Dan Keith

DAN KEITH was slumped down in a big old armchair but he was not at ease. For an atmosphere of evil brooded over the old house and strange sounds came from the shadows that were sinister black blotches in the semi-darkness of the big living room as he listened to the monotonously droning voice of the middle-aged man who was Joan Stanton's guardian. The fire in the open grate hissed and crackled as though it found Arthur Lake's suave voice to its liking.

"—a weird legend I'll grant you."

Keith found himself suddenly conscious of Lake's words. His gaze centered on Lake, hating the man for his apparent delight in adding to the uncanny atmosphere of the place.

"Most of us believe that a griffin is a fabulous creature with the body of a lion and the head of an eagle," Lake went on smoothly. "But how can we be sure that it does not actually exist? In pre-Revolution days this old house was once an inn called the Sign of the Griffin."

Keith saw that Joan was leaning forward in her chair listening with rapt interest to every word that Lake uttered. The firelight gleamed on her lovely face, her beautiful light brown hair, and cast its flickering light over her slender figure in the yellow evening gown.

"Proving what?" Keith demanded.

Lake glanced at him quickly, surprised at the aggressiveness that had crept into the tone of the younger man.

"That it is only natural that a place as old as this would have its legends of the supernatural," Lake said placidly. "It is said that this house is haunted by an ancient savage, a witch doctor who ruled the Indians in this part of the country long before a white man ever saw America."

"How spoofy!" said Joan softly. "What was his name, Cousin Arthur?"

"He was called the Thunder God," said Lake. "And he supposedly was able to materialize creatures out of the half-world—creatures such as the griffin."

BUT Keith was no longer listening. He had turned his head and was watching the door of the room as it slowly opened. Eyes peered into the shadows as a figure loomed in the doorway. It was To-

Forces of Terror Strike from the Void to Be Stayed Only by Stronger Forces for Good!

nega, the Seneca Indian who was caretaker of the old house.

From the first Keith had disliked the idea of spending the night here in this old place that was part of the property that Joan had inherited upon the death of her father two months ago. But when she had invited him to go with her and her cousin Arthur Lake, who had been appointed her guardian, he had accepted. He had been unable to dismiss the idea from his mind that it was his duty to go, in order to protect the girl he loved and was to marry within two weeks. Though what he was to protect her from he hadn't the vaguest idea.

Tonega came stolidly into the room and marched up to Lake. The Indian had only faint ideas of how a servant should act, but he was a good cook and an excellent worker, which was fortunate, as he was the only one there to take care of the trio during their brief visit.

"Hear noise in cellar," said Tonega. "Somebody down there now."

"Probably some tramp," said Lake, getting to his feet. "But I guess we had better go and take a look. Coming, Keith?"

For an instant Dan Keith hesitated, then he stood up. After all there was really nothing wrong with this old house. He was just getting jittery, letting the atmosphere of the place get on his nerves.

"All right," he said. "I'll go with you, Lake. You had better stay here, Joan."

"That's best," said Lake. He touched a button on the wall and the electric lights clicked on. In their glow the big living room looked old but homey and comfortable. "We'll be back in a few moments, Joan."

With the Indian in the lead the three men went back through the house until they reached the cellar stairs. Lake tried the electric switch at the head of the stairs but found it did not turn on the lights below. He produced a flashlight and they went ahead with that, descending into the gloom.

It was pitch dark down there as Keith reached the foot of the stairs. And instantly something, or somebody came hurtling at him out of the darkness. He grabbed for his assailant and caught a bit of cloth. Then something crashed down on his head and everything went Stygian black as he fell to the cellar floor unconscious.

Keith had no idea how long it was before he finally opened his eyes. But he did know—and quickly—that he was tied and propped up against the wall of a big room. Beside him stood Arthur Lake, also tied. And as if drawn by a magnet the eyes of both men went to a table not far from them. Joan was lying on that table, and steel shackles were fastened to her wrists and ankles!

"Look!" Lake suddenly shouted. "The Thunder God!"

A strange figure had appeared out of the shadows. Long hair hung about a thin, sinister face, hair that was held back by a copper band in which two goat horns were fastened. A dark cloaklike garment covered the wiry, sinuous body.

"The Thunder God is supposed to have the power of driving evil spirits out of us all," muttered Lake in a low voice. "Perhaps he may be able to call upon the griffin to help him."

BUT there was a note of cynical amusement in Lake's tone that Keith did not like. He glanced sharply at the man tied beside him. They had both dressed for dinner and now Keith saw that Lake's white tie had been torn open. Could that have been the bit of cloth that Keith had grabbed in the dark, he wondered. Could it have been Lake who knocked him out? If so why?

Questions vanished from Keith's brain as the sinister figure Arthur Lake had called the Thunder God came closer until Keith could scent the dank smell of the grave. The weird apparition paused by the table on which Joan was stretched out.

Then Keith saw it. At first it looked like a winged lizard far off in the distance, then grew in size as it came closer. It was the Griffin! It had a long neck, somewhat like a cross between that of an eagle and a reptile. It's body was that of a lion, but

its feet were not paws, they were eagle's claws. And wings like those of an eagle jutted out above its forelegs.

It moved slowly, as if climbing an invisible hill. And by the time it had reached a spot where it was poised directly over the girl it had grown to the size of a dog.

Joan screamed in horror, and Lake uttered a hoarse shout, stark fear in his voice now. In spite of himself Keith was trembling as it was borne in on him that this winged creature was some terrifying materialization from the spirit half world. Cold sweat damped his face as he writhed and fought against his bonds.

The Thunder God extended his claw-like hands and a strange glow radiated from the withered old fingers. But their power held the griffin motionless, though it appeared to be struggling against the force that had stopped it.

Then suddenly the lights went out, a strange light that had illuminated the whole cellar. Though it was not until afterward that Keith remembered that the electricity had not been turned on.

In the black darkness he heard Arthur Lake cry out in mortal terror.

"Take it away from me!" Lake was shouting. "It's real! I didn't plan this! I—" His voice died away in a ghastly gurgle.

Keith had not let up for an instant in his straining at his ropes. Suddenly he felt them snap and at the moment he realized he was free. The electric lights came on startlingly. Who—or what—had turned them on he never knew. But the brilliant light showed Joan still stretched on the table, and Lake sprawled face downward on the floor. Not far from him was the Indian, Tonega. He, too, was lying there motionless.

Keith turned the two men over. Both dead, were clawed to death by something. And the griffin and the Thunder God had completely disappeared. Keith grabbed up a key that glinted, on the table. It fitted the manacles that held Joan's arms and legs and she was quickly released.

"That horrible creature!" she choked, swaying.

"Lake planned it as a trick, Joan," said Keith. "He was trying to drive you insane so that he might get your money as next of kin. But he made a terrible mistake. He forgot that this was the house of the griffin—that the strange beast does haunt this place. If the Thunder God had not also appeared and held back the griffin by the power in his hands it might have grown larger and larger until it had destroyed us all." He glanced down at the still forms. "But as it was evil it was only attracted by evil."

Joan shuddered as he took her gently by the arm and helped her up the cellar stairs—away from two dead men on which the griffin had left its sign.

WEIRD SURGERY CREATES BAFFLING NEW FORMS OF LIFE

in

THE CRAWLING CORPSE

A Novelet of Bizarre Sorcery

By ELI COLTER

COMING IN THE NEXT STRANGE STORIES

Spawn of Blackness

An Evil God Shuns the Light and Seeks Victims in Darkness!

By CARL JACOBI

Author of "House of the Ravens," "Cosmic Teletype," etc.

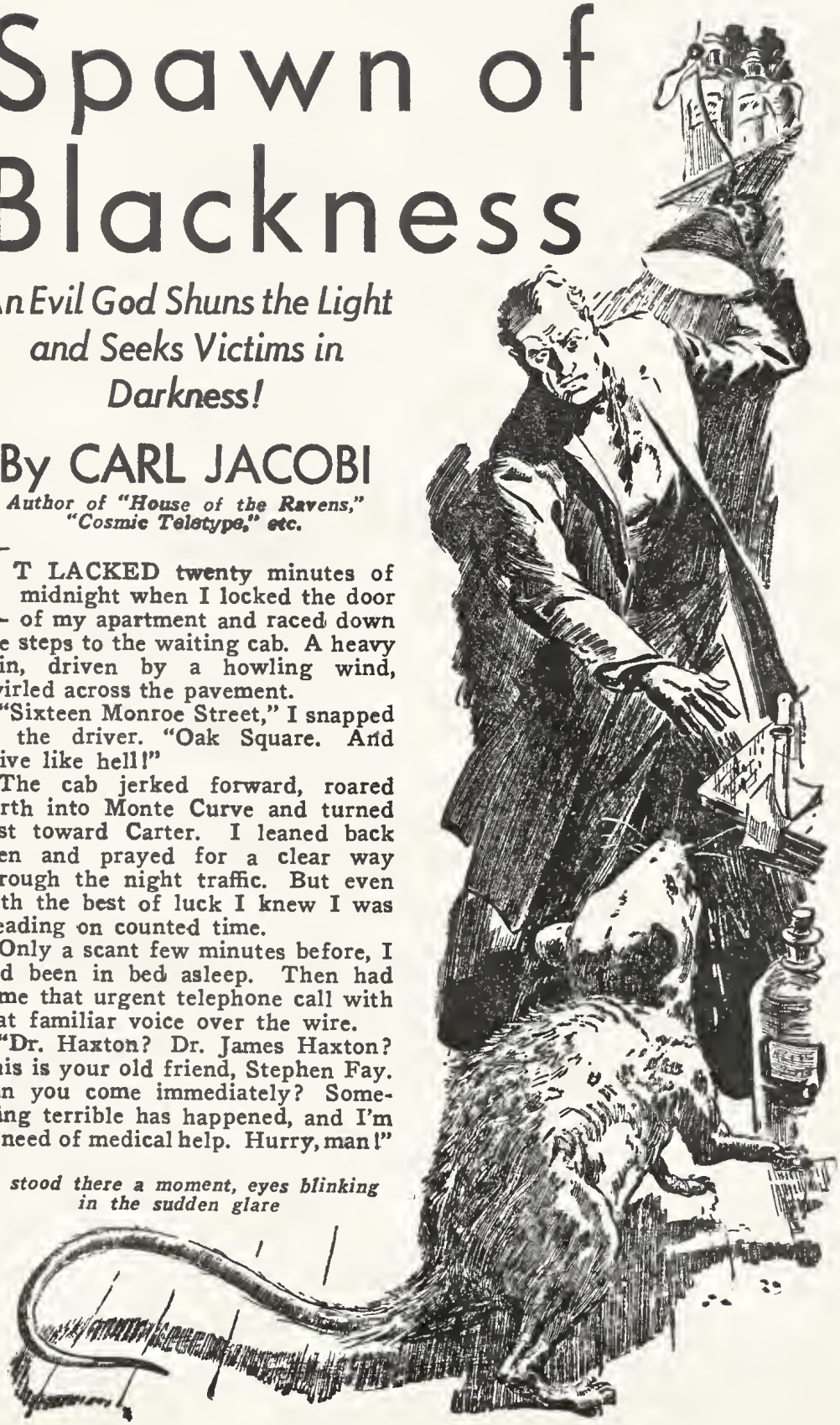
IT LACKED twenty minutes of midnight when I locked the door of my apartment and raced down the steps to the waiting cab. A heavy rain, driven by a howling wind, swirled across the pavement.

"Sixteen Monroe Street," I snapped to the driver. "Oak Square. And drive like hell!"

The cab jerked forward, roared north into Monte Curve and turned east toward Carter. I leaned back then and prayed for a clear way through the night traffic. But even with the best of luck I knew I was treading on counted time.

Only a scant few minutes before, I had been in bed asleep. Then had come that urgent telephone call with that familiar voice over the wire.

"Dr. Haxton? Dr. James Haxton? This is your old friend, Stephen Fay. Can you come immediately? Something terrible has happened, and I'm in need of medical help. Hurry, man!"



It stood there a moment, eyes blinking in the sudden glare

The voice had ended in a gasp and a moan, and the connection had been severed with a crash.

Fay—Stephen Fay. I had known the man for a matter of ten years. We had worked side by side, in fact, as struggling students with adjoining laboratories. A huge man with a frank, open face, an engaging smile and an uncontrollable desire to probe deeper into the mysteries of science.

Down Carter we sped, windshield gray with drooling rain, across St. Clair, and into Monroe. Stephen Fay's residence was a forlorn pile of red brick, three stories in height, with a narrow, uninviting doorway.

A girl answered my ring, and as I hesitated, staring at her, she grasped my arm and drew me quickly inside.

"Thank God, you've come, Doctor," she said. "My uncle—Mr. Fay—is in the library. He's bleeding badly."

Even in the excitement of the moment I found myself noting the exquisite beauty of the white-faced girl as we paced silently down the corridor. Then she thrust a connecting door open, and I found myself face to face with my old friend.

He lay stretched full length on a divan, face contorted in agony. His coat and shirt had been ripped to shreds, as if by the repeated slashes of a razor-edged knife, and the exposed flesh was striped and cross-striped with deep gashes and incisions. A bath towel, red with blood, had been pressed against his throat. Removing it, I saw that he was bleeding profusely from a wound a scant inch from the jugular.

FAY rose up as I slid out of my coat.

"Leave the room, Jane," he gasped. "Dr. Haxton will take care of me."

It was a hospital job, one that required four stitches and possibly a local anesthetic, but I knew Fay's wonderful strength and his hatred for any undue commotion. So without further word I set to work.

Half an hour later he was resting easily, weak from loss of blood, but still amazingly calm and composed.

"Haxton," he said as I tried to keep him from talking, "Haxton, I want you to stay here tonight. Can you arrange it? I—I need someone to help me protect that girl. It—it may come again."

I started to give him a bromide, thought better of it, and closed my case with a snap.

"What may come again?" I asked. "In heaven's name, what's wrong here?"

Fay swallowed painfully. "I'll tell you," he said. "I'll tell you what's wrong. It's a rat!"

I saw that he was in deadly earnest and that he was awaiting my reaction with almost feverish anxiety. His hands opened and closed convulsively, and his eyes regarded me with set pupils.

Then the stethescope fell from my hands.

"A *what?*" I stammered.

He rose from the divan and lurched across to the great flat-topped desk that stood in the center of the room. He seized something like a paper weight from its surface and handed it to me.

"Look at it. I don't think you've even seen anything quite like it before."

The thing was made of wood, mounted on a flat base, and from top to bottom measured no more than six inches. A small carving it was, with agate eyes, protruding teeth, and a long, curved tail, crudely fashioned to resemble a life-size rat.

Placed on the desk where it belonged, it would hardly have attracted a second glance, but leering up at me as it was now from my cupped hands, it was a thing of inanimate horror. There was something repulsive in that squat gray form, something utterly loathsome in the way it crouched there on its black mounting, poised as though ready to leap at my throat.

I shuddered slightly. "Not very pretty."

Fay sat down in a chair and closed his eyes.

"I found that in an Arab shop," he began, "in the native quarter of Macassar, in the Celebes. Bought it for a few pennies simply because it caught my eye. I didn't find out what it was until I came back to the States

and showed it to my friend, Henderson, of the Chicago School of Anthropology. That carving is not a fetish or an ornament, but an image, a native object of worship."

I said nothing. There was a story coming, but I had associated with Fay long enough to know that he would start at the beginning, reserving any climax there might be for the last.

"NORTH of New Guinea, almost on the equator, in longitude one hundred and forty-two degrees," he continued, "there is an island known as Wuvulu, a tiny pinpoint of land near the Moluccas. Henderson tells me the aborigines of this island have one of the lowest forms of religion in the Indies. They worship the rat! This image is one of the few that has found its way into the outside world.

"When Jane, my niece, came to live with me, she refused to let the ugly thing repose on my desk openly and insisted that I cover it. I dropped an old piece of black cloth over it, and it has remained there in that manner until tonight—until five minutes before I telephoned you. Then"—Fay braced himself and leaned far forward—"then it came alive!"

The man sat there, scrutinizing me intently, watching my every facial move. He must have seen the incredulity in my eyes, for he rose slowly like a figure on clockwork.

"You don't believe, Haxton? You think I'm joking? Come, and I'll show you the proof!"

He moved to the door, still weak from loss of blood, and I followed a few steps behind. At the threshold two people entered the room to meet us—the girl who had admitted me to this house, and a tall, thin man clad in a rubberized raincoat.

Fay waved his hand in introduction.

"My niece, Jane Barron, Haxton. I've already explained to her that my accident was caused by the breaking of a glass acid vat in the laboratory."

He nodded significantly, and I understood at once that he desired to keep the truth from the girl for the present.

"And this," he went on, "is Corelli, my laboratory assistant and helper."

The Italian bowed low. Apparently he had been out and had returned to the house only a few moments before the accident, whatever it was, had occurred.

"Are you all right, Uncle?" the girl cried. "You look so weak and pale." Then to me: "You must tell him to be more careful with his experiments, Doctor."

Fay patted her gently. "I'll be all right, child. But it's so late I've asked Dr. Haxton to stay the rest of the night. Will you arrange the guest room?"

Corelli looked at his employer with concern. "I trust the wounds are not too painful, Signor," he said. "If you wish, I will—"

Fay nodded absently. "Go to bed, Corelli. Dr. Haxton and I are going to stay up awhile. I'm going to show him my color-music machine."

The Italian bowed once more and left the room. Jane disappeared up a staircase that led to the floor above, and a moment later I found myself pacing down an ill-lighted corridor by the side of the wounded man.

We came at length to a large high-ceilinged room, lined with racks of apparatus.

"My laboratory," Fay said.

My attention was attracted to a ponderous machine in the center, which at the moment seemed only a confusing mass of wheels, tubes, reflectors and dials.

Fay led the way past this instrument, and stopped abruptly, pointing to a spot near the floor. There was a large ragged hole there, reaching from the bottom of the baseboard to a point some distance up the wall. From the hole, leading across the parquet floor, were a series of sharp scratches, marks that had penetrated the varnish.

TO THE left a small zinc-covered table was overturned on its side, with a mass of apparatus thrown in wild confusion. Still wet and dripping over the latter was a large clot of blood and a tuft of what I saw on closer inspection to be short gray fur.

I rose to my feet slowly. Fay

moved across the room to one of several chairs.

"I told you that rat image came to life tonight. You thought I was crazy when I said it. Believe me, Haxton, I never was more sane in my life.

"I've been working hard the last month or so, perfecting an experiment with what is known as color-music. Tonight Jane insisted I take the evening off and go with her to a movie. Accordingly I told Corelli, my assistant, to get everything ready for a final test in the morning before he left for the evening. We returned early. Jane went to her room, and I went immediately to the laboratory.

"All the way I was conscious of some kind of danger ahead. Then I pushed open the laboratory door and stepped inside. It happened before I could move. By the light of the night lamp in the corridor I had a glimpse of a gray shape and a head with red eyes and white gleaming teeth. The thing was utterly huge, large as a dog, and it threw itself straight at my throat, clawing like mad.

"I screamed, I believe. Then I managed to twist free, reach out and switch on the light.

"With the room lit, I saw it. It stood there a moment, eyes blinking in the sudden glare. Then as if the light were its only fear, it turned, raced across the floor, upset that table and made for that hole which it had gnawed in the wall. But before it reached it, I had sufficiently collected my wits to seize a heavy knife from the stand by the door, hurl it and catch the thing a full blow on the back. It let out a terrible shriek, then disappeared through the wall."

Fay paused, gripped the chair arm tightly.

"And unquestionably that rat was a gigantic incarnation of the image on my desk in the library!"

I sat there stupidly. "It all sounds impossible," I said. "Mad—insane in every detail. But why do you say that the rat was an incarnation of that wooden image?"

Fay leaned back. "Because," he said huskily, "the thing was no real rat, no natural creature of a living order. I know that. It was a hideous caricature, a deformed monstrosity with the same exaggerated lines and detail of that wooden god. The head was rectangular rather than round. The eyes were far out of proportion, and the teeth—were long white fangs. God, it was horrible!"

For a long time after that, while a clock high up on the wall ticked off the passing seconds, we sat in silence. At length I voiced my thoughts.

"Whatever the thing is, supernatural or otherwise, it's real enough to cause flesh-and-blood wounds and to be wounded itself. We can't stand by and let it come and go as it wills. Where does that hole in the wall lead?"

FAY shook his head. "This is an old house," he said, "and there are unusually large spaces between the walls. I found that out when I tapped them for several of my experiments. That rat has the run of the entire structure. It must have been only chance that led it to choose the laboratory for a point to gnaw its way to freedom."

We used two heavy boards and a piece of sheet-iron to cover the opening. Along the baseboard on each of the four walls we ran an uncovered piece of copper wire, electrically charged with a high voltage from Fay's laboratory current. It meant that a second attempt on the part of the horror to enter the room would result in its instant electrocution. It meant that—if the thing were not invulnerable to such a mundane defense.

"No one knows about what happened tonight, save me?" I asked then.

Fay shook his head. "No one. I didn't choose to frighten my niece, and Corelli was out at the time."

"Corelli has been with you long?"

"About a year. He's an odd sort of person but harmless, I think. Never says much except when he talks about his color theory. Then he babbles incessantly. The man has a mad way of mixing spiritualism with science. Believes that white is the essence of all that is good and black is the lair of evil, or some such rot. He even

showed me a thesis on this which he had written. Aside from that however, he's really a capable laboratory assistant. . . ."

A strange bed to me, whatever the surroundings, is always the same. Tonight, with my mind milling over the story that had been related to me, I found sleep almost impossible. Hours passed before I dozed off.

But at three o'clock, by the radium clock on the dresser, I found myself sitting upright in bed. Something, some foreign noise had wakened me.

I got up, crossed to the door and looked out into the corridor. Blackness met my eyes. Then a sound reached me from the far end of the hall, and I stole stealthily forward. The sound came louder. It was *swish-swish* of liquid being brushed on a hard surface, the sound of a man painting.

I pressed my body close to the wall, muffling the noise of my breathing through the cloth of my pajama top. Footsteps then, receding footsteps. Carefully keeping my distance I moved on, and at the turn of the hall stopped abruptly.

The door of the bedchamber there —Jane's bedchamber—stood out in the blackness like a panel of silver fire. It had been painted with some kind of luminous paint. The brush marks were still wet and sticky.

I twisted the latch and peered into the room. The faint glow from the window revealed the girl sleeping peacefully in the bed.

Nodding with relief, I moved on again down the corridor. At the staircase I heard the library door on the floor below click shut. I descended slowly and waited at the foot of the stairs for an eternity, listening.

At length I pushed boldly into the library. Corelli was sitting at the desk, a trail of smoke rising from his cigarette, an open book before him. He looked up as if in surprise.

"COULDN'T sleep," I said shortly. "Thought I'd come down here and read a spell. You seem to have had the same idea."

He stared at me, then broke into a short laugh.

"I do more than read, Signor. I study. I am busy days, so I have only nights to work on my theory."

"Ah, yes," I replied. "Mr. Fay spoke to me about it. Something about color, isn't it, and the qualities of black and white?"

A gleam of interest sprang into his eyes.

"The Signor is interested in color, yes?"

"Some. Stephen Fay is my friend, and I have worked with him on many of his experiments."

The Italian nodded and pointed a finger toward his book.

"I am read LaFlarge," he said. "A brilliant mind, but a fool. They are all fools, these scientists. They see only the physical facts. They see only things which exist materially before their eyes. They claim there is nothing psychic."

I crossed to a chair and sat down.

"Tell me," I said, "what has the psychic to do with color?"

"Everything, Signor. Fay — all scientists—will tell you that color is a phenomenon that occurs when daylight passes through a quartz prism. The rays from the sun are decomposed and form what the eyes see as the spectrum band, red at one end, violet at the other. That is elementary, of course.

"A body, a piece of blue cloth, for example, illuminated by daylight, appears colored because it absorbs red and yellow and throws back blue. In other words color in an object is produced by absorption. Is that clear?"

"I know all that," I said.

"Black, which of course is the absence of all color, is seen as black because it is the absorption of all and the reflection of none. One might liken it to a lake of pitch in the midst of the jungle. It takes everything into itself and allows nothing to escape. It is iniquity, the essence of all evil.

"Has it never occurred to you that even the ancients recognized this fact? We have Satan as the prince of blackness; the worshipping ceremonial to him is the black mass; we have black art and black magic. Throughout the ages black has always been

synonymous for everything that is evil."

"I see," I said slowly.

"My theory then," Corelli went on, "lies in the exploration of black, not only physically but psychically. Let us say we have a room entirely painted black. Those walls are then the absorption of all wave lengths of light. Any photographer will tell you that an object—a book, a chair, a table—is seen only as a result of that object refracting wave lengths of light into the retina of the human eye.

"Is it not reasonable to suppose, therefore, that in this room of which I speak, any object or the refracted psychic equivalent of it will find itself likewise absorbed into the black walls?

"You begin to perceive, Signor? Where there is blackness, there is always fear. A child cries out when it enters a dark room. We reason with the child, tell it there is nothing there. Might we not be wrong? Might not the child's clean mind sense something which we in our more complex lives do not see nor understand?"

CORELLI leaned back in his chair and lit another cigarette.

"Granting all that," I said slowly, "why would it necessarily follow that in black we would find only evil. Since black, as you say, is the absorption of everything, it must absorb the good as well, and the former has always been acknowledged to be the stronger of the two."

The Italian's eyes did not change.

"Think a moment, Signor," he said, "and you will see that only evil can live where there is utter blackness. Anything else would be smothered like a flower away from its precious sunlight. I—"

His voice clipped off, and I stiffened in my chair. From the floor above had come a girl's scream. Hollow and muffled by the intervening walls, the cry filtered through the house, filled with fear and stark terror.

With a single leap I was across the room and racing up the stairs. In the corridor above I switched on the lights as Stephen Fay emerged from his room and, white-faced, began to run toward me.

I reached the freshly-painted door of Jane's room, ripped it open and burst inside. The girl was huddled on the bed, eyes wide with terror.

"Jane!" I cried. "Miss Barron, are you hurt?"

She gave a low moan and buried her head in her hands, sobbing.

"It was horrible!" she gasped. "A monster! A rat! A rat twenty times the ordinary size! It came out of that hole in the wall next to my dressing table and—and leaped onto the bed. Then it crouched, staring at me. Then—then—O-o-oh!"

The girl sobbed hysterically. . . .

It was a grim group that stood in the gray light of the library next morning. Jane Barron was still white and trembling, though I had administered a slight sedative a few minutes before. Corelli smoked nervously, throwing away cigarettes and lighting fresh ones before they were half consumed.

"I'm warning each of you," Fay said, "to move about the house with the greatest of caution. Something is loose in these walls, something we can't understand. Besides that, during the night the door of Jane's room was for some unexplainable reason coated with a paint containing calcium sulphide, making it appear luminous in the dark. Also someone entered my laboratory and tampered with my color-music machine.

"Haxton"—Fay nodded toward me—"I'm placing my niece's protection in your hands. Later perhaps it may be necessary to call the police."

After that I was alone in the library.

For some reason I had chosen not to reveal to Fay that it was the Italian who had smeared paint on the girl's room. Until further developments I meant to keep that fact to myself.

I picked up the thing then, which Fay claimed was at the bottom of the whole affair; the wooden carving of the rat. Again as I stared down upon its ugly body and curiously deformed head, an inner sense of horror welled over me.

Yet I told myself that was absurd. The image was only a manufactured god, representing a fanatic religion.

BUT an instant later I sat quite still as an insane idea began to clamor for recognition far back in a corner of my brain! An insane idea, yes, and yet one which fitted the conditions and which offered a method of combat! I leaped to my feet and headed for the laboratory.

Fay was there, as I had expected, and his composed manner quieted me for a moment.

"I can't understand it," he was saying. "The instrument was quite all right yesterday evening when I left for the movie. Corelli claims not to have touched it, and anyway he would have no reason at all for doing so. Yet the entire slide containing the color plates has been removed and this wooden frame inserted in its place."

I stared at the device. "It looks like a projection machine," I said.

Fay nodded. "It is. The instrument is constructed to throw upon a screen a rapidly changing circle of colors. It will be synchronized with an organ in such a way that when a piece of music is played, each note of sound will be accompanied by a corresponding color on the screen. There are seven notes, and there are seven primary colors. Thus in a rendition of a sonata we will both see and hear the composition. I—"

He broke off as the door burst open and Corelli lurched into the room.

"The rat, Signors!" he whispered. "It has come again! I saw it in the corridor."

But the corridor was empty. We traversed its length from one end to the other. Then we continued our search through the entire house. Deep into the many shadows of that ancient structure we probed. The rooms were silent and empty. Those on the third floor were closed off and barren of furniture. We found nothing.

At the foot of the stairs I suddenly whirled upon Fay.

"This new machine of yours," I said. "It uses artificial light to produce its colors?"

"Of course," he replied. "A carbon arc at present. Later an incandescent of some kind."

"And with the color plates removed as they are, the only thing that would appear on the screen would be a circle of white light. Is that right?"

"Not exactly," Fay explained. "Artificial light differs from daylight in that there is a deficiency of blue. Strictly speaking, the instrument would throw a shaft of yellow light."

"But could it be made pure white light?" I persisted.

He thought a moment. "Yes," he said, "it could. I have a Sheringham improved daylight lamp. Its light is the nearest man-made parallel to the rays of the sun. What are you driving at?"

"Fay," I said, "if you value your life, if you value the life of your niece, listen to me! Insert that lamp in your machine and arrange the projector so that it can be moved in a complete arc. Do you understand? In a complete arc!"

AT HALF-PAST ten that night I stood once again before the frowning door of 16 Monroe Street. The intervening hours I had spent in a hurried trip to my own rooms and a brief but necessary visit to my patients in St. Mary's hospital.

Nothing had happened during my absence. Fay led me to the library, poured two glasses of brandy and then nervously packed his pipe.

"The machine is ready," he said. "What you've got in mind, I don't know, but the daylight lamp has been substituted for the carbon arc, and the projector is mounted on a swivel. What now?"

I set down my glass. "Let's have a look," I said.

In the laboratory a moment later Fay adjusted several controls and pointed the instrument toward a screen. Then, motioning me to extinguish the lights, he switched on the current.

A dazzling shaft of light leaped from the narrow tube and spread a glaring circle of effulgence on the screen. Fay moved the projector, and the light traveled slowly, stabbing

(Continued on page 120)

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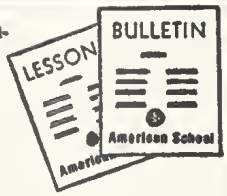

*Name*_____ *Age*_____ *Occupation*_____

*Street*_____ *City*_____ *State*_____

(Continued from page 118)
each article in the room in sharp relief.

"You have casters you could mount on the instrument, making it movable?" I asked.

Fay thought a moment. "Y-es," he slowly replied.

"Use them then and add an extension of at least twenty-five feet to the current wire."

He glared at me, but I swung about and left the room before he could voice protestations.

From eleven o'clock until eleven-thirty I prowled aimlessly about the house, glancing from time to time at the wall baseboards, nervously sucking a cold cigar. Finally in the library I picked up the desk phone and called Police Headquarters.

"McFee?" I said. "Dr. Haxton speaking. Yes, that's right—of St. Mary's. McFee, I'm at Mr. Stephen Fay's residence, Sixteen Monroe Street, just across from Oak Square. Can you send a man out here right away? No, no trouble yet, but I'm afraid there might be. . . . Yes, in a hurry. I'll explain later."

I forked the phone and waited. A quarter of an hour passed, and then, answering the ring at the street door, I found a lanky, hawk-faced policeman.

"Listen," I said before he could ask any questions, "I'm the physician in charge here. Your job is simply to look on, remember anything you see and prepare to sign a written report as a witness."

At ten minutes past twelve the five of us—Fay, Jane, Corelli, the patrolman and I entered the laboratory. We took positions according to my directions, the girl between Fay and me, the Italian in a chair slightly to the side.

Five feet in front of the door a connecting drop-cord was let down from the ceiling with a red-frosted electric light. Fay had wheeled the heavy color machine forward, facing the door.

"Ready, Fay?" I said, trying hard to keep my voice steady.

He nodded, and I stepped to the door, closed it halfway and extinguished the lights. We were in deep gloom now with the dim glow of the red light gleaming like an evil eye before us. And silence broken only by the hollow rumble of a far-away street car.

Suddenly Corelli leaped to his feet.

"Signors," he cried, "I refuse to sit here like a cat in the dark!"

"You'll stay where you are!" Fay snapped.

AND so we waited. I could hear the ticking of my wrist-watch. The Italian's breathing grew louder and more hurried, and I could feel Jane's hands open and close convulsively around the chair arm.

A quarter of an hour snailed by. I wiped a bead of perspiration from my forehead. Ten minutes more. And then we heard it!

From the outer corridor came the padding of approaching feet. Toward the laboratory door they came. I placed a warning hand on Fay's arm.

The door opened wide. A scream of horror mounted unsounded to my lips. What I saw I will never forget. A shapeless gray body with a rectangular head crouched there, eyes gleaming hellishly.

For a split second the five of us remained motionless with horror. Then riving the silence came Jane's shriek followed by a deafening roar from the policeman's revolver. The rat braced itself and leaped into the room.

"The light!" I cried. "Fay, the white light, do you hear?"

There was a snap and a hum, and a shaft of glaring blue-white radiance shot from the mouth of the projector. But even as it formed a circle on the far wall, the horror singled out one of our number for its attack. Corelli!

The Italian went down with a scream as the rat threw itself upon him.

I heard the dull crunch and the snap of breaking bone.

Then that beam of light swept across the room under Fay's guiding hand and centered full on the thing. livid under the ghastly ray, its head twisted around, eyes twin globules of

hate. With a mewling cry of rage it made for the door.

"After it!" I shouted.

Together Fay and I rolled the projector into the outer corridor. It was blind, that corridor. It ended in a blank wall, and the doors on either side beyond the laboratory were closed.

Straight down the hall we pushed the color machine. The rat was uttering queer rasping sounds now, shambling wildly from side to side as it sought to escape the hated light.

Trapped, the thing stopped, whirled, then plunged straight at Fay. Even as the scientist's cry rose up I rushed forward to aid him. A raking claw gashed its way to the bone in my left shoulder. A nauseating animal stench choked my nostrils.

Then I seized the machine's projector tube and swung it. The white glare swept upon the rat squarely, centered on the head. An instant the horror poised motionless. Then slowly it began to disintegrate. The features ran together like heated clay. The eyes and mouth fell away. Before me a lump of gray fur diminished to a thin slime, to a darkish mist that rose slowly upward. Then that, too, wavered under my gaze and disappeared. . . .

I came back to consciousness on the divan in the library with Jane Barron chafing my wrists and Stephen Fay looking on nervously.

"It's all over, Haxton," he was saying. "Corelli's dead. The rat killed him. But—but I don't understand—"

I struggled to my feet, dazedly.

"Come to the laboratory, Fay," I said, "and I'll show you."

WE MADE our silent way to that room of apparatus where the Italian's body still lay motionless on the floor. Bending over it I searched the pockets and at length drew forth two objects. A small leather-covered notebook and a piece of black cloth, about the size of a napkin.

"Recognize it?" I asked, holding up the cloth.

(Concluded on page 122)

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(Concluded from page 121)

Fay nodded. "Yes. It's the covering Jane gave me for the rat image on the library desk. But—"

I opened the notebook, glanced at it, then handed it to Fay. For a long time he remained silent as he scanned the pages.

When he looked up at length a strange light was in his eyes.

"You see," I said, "Corelli was in love with your niece. Didn't he at some time ask if he could marry her?"

"Yes," Fay replied. "But that was absurd, of course. I told him he was crazy and let it go at that."

"Exactly." I nodded. "And in doing so you injured his Latin pride. He became mad with secret rage, and he swore revenge against you. You know the man's color theory—that black being the absorption of everything is the lair of all evil. He saw that rag image on the library desk, and he recognized it as an artifact of devil-worship, the essence of everything satanic.

"Over the image you had draped a black cloth. According to Corelli's theory then, that cloth was the psychic equivalent of all that the image in its carved form represented. Do you understand?

"He stole the cloth, mounted it on a wooden frame and inserted it in your color-music machine. Then he reversed the mechanism, and by casting a beam of black light upon the screen caused that horrible monster to be freed from its black cloth imprisonment and endowed with physical life.

"If we accept that reasoning, then Corelli's intention was to find a way of destroying you and at the same time prove the truth of his theory. That is why he smeared the luminous paint on Jane's bedroom door. White, being the antithesis of black, was a counter-defense, and he had no desire to see your niece harmed.

"For the same reason I asked you to insert the daylight lamp in the color machine. It was the only way of fighting the thing."

Fay had listened to me in silence. A queer, bewildered look crossed his face.

"But—but you can't expect me to believe all that," he objected. "It isn't scientific. It's made from beginning to end! The whole thing has no foundation in fact. Black—white— Good Lord, man, no scientist in the world would believe—"

"Perhaps not," I agreed. "Perhaps I'm wrong. If I am, we'll never know. Corelli is dead. But one thing I do know. I'm going to take this cloth and notebook and that image in the library, throw them into the fire and burn them."

And I did.

THE GHOSTLY VENGEANCE

(Concluded from page 95)

alongside the ghost and the specter vanished like a snuffed-out candle flame.

I found my voice then. "Man overboard!" I yelled.

That brought the mate to his senses. He grabbed a life-ring and heaved it. Scared as the men were, they jumped to braces and sheets and backed the yards. But all we saw was the life-ring bobbing on the waves. There was never a sign of the skipper. Eastwood drew a long deep breath like a man coming up for air after almost drowning.

"I reckon he paid his debt," he said in a half-whisper. "Maybe now he's gone the ghost won't trouble us more."

It didn't. We never saw it again. From that time on the old *Enterprise* was a happy ship. Eastwood was a changed man. He was as easy-going a master as ever I sailed with. A mighty strange thing happened, Mister, when we were rounding the Horn. The piece of canvas I'd nailed over the bloodstain got loose and the wind tore it clear away. And where it had been the deck was as clean and white as ever, and that, Mister, is the gospel truth.

THE GEIST OF THE JUNGLE

(Concluded from page 103)

It was several minutes before he could control himself. A great many things became clear if not understandable. "Impossible," he had said, and what had Duncan replied?

"A great many things which you impatiently label as impossible today you will be quite ready to accept as natural phenomena which you simply do not comprehend."

As the young American stood there he understood that the ghost of Murdock Duncan had led him to the explorer's death site, the spot where he had presumably fallen a victim to the sacrificial rites of the savage descendants of the ancient Mayas.

The *cenote* boomed again.

THE LIGHT MUST BURN

(Concluded from page 108)

every night since the storm!" MacElroy interrupted sharply. "How could that be if they both were dead?"

"I don't know. Get the duty book!"

THE inspector ran a trembling finger down the column. "That," he said, pointing to the last plain entry, "was the night of the storm. Howard on till midnight. Derringer relieved him at 12:01."

"Look, Inspector! What's this written below?"

They took the book to the open door for better light. Below Derringer's last signature each space was filled, bringing the book up to date. Very faint but still quite legible, every line bore the scarcely discernible signature, *"Howard!"* And scrawled across the page, still in that ghostly hand was the motto: *"The Light Must Burn!"*

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THE BLACK ARTS

(Continued from page 8)

that his command has been obeyed — the prisoner was thrown bodily into the pool of slimy water at the edge and was forced to swim to the other side within the swamp.

But there is grave mumbling on the part of native soldiers. The corporal fears trouble.

"Better to have killed the thief," he says to an officer who has laughed at the easy punishment.

Return of the Native

Then revenge strikes—the most savage revenge any father can experience. At midnight his daughter's maid rushes to the colonel and cries:

"Oh, monsieur! Yvonne—she is gone—I have looked in the garden, but she is not there."

An immediate search is made. The colonel summons the native corporal as one who best knows the surrounding country. The moon is full, but there is no trace of the beautiful blonde girl who was walking in the garden before going to bed.

Revenge—the swamp! This thought suddenly strikes the colonel.

"My God—no!" But fearing the worst he goes with his men to the edge of the swamp. There is a path beside the pool, leading into the swamp—not a path for men, but for animals.

Just as the colonel is about to order some men to follow that path, he sees a soldier rushing to him. A dying native has just been found crawling out of the swamp on the north side. The same native that had been punished that day. He claims that the white woman bit him. The entire searching party rushes to the spot. The native is dead—his throat badly bitten, and his face covered with scratches. He has bled to death—from a torn jugular vein.

The colonel questions the sentry who saw the man crawling.

"All that I could understand sir, was that the white woman had attacked him when he took her into the swamp—that she is still in the swamp."

But that section of the swamp is so thick with undergrowth that it would be impossible to cut through at night. Until they could tell in which section the girl is hidden, it would be useless to enter. The native corporal suggests that they go to the opposite side, on the hill; maybe they could look down and see her.

The colonel orders searchlights and they go to the side of the hill. The lights are played on the swamp, while men call to the girl. An hour passes—there is no sign of a human being in the entire swamp, nearly a mile wide and a quarter mile deep.

Then one of the soldiers calls:

"I see something white—it is moving—about a thousand meters in, straight ahead."

All lights are focused on the spot. Yes, it is a white body—and it is darting to and fro as though jumping from bog to bog!

The colonel calls: "Yvonne—follow the light." He is about to plunge into the swamp after his daughter, when the native corporal grabs him.

"No—no, my colonel — she will come. You may lose her if you leave the hill."

Nearer and nearer the white body approaches, but it does not call out in answer to the father's cry. With the light behind him, the colonel stands at the edge of the swamp-forest waiting for his daughter to come into the clearing.

Suddenly she looms up in front of him. The native corporal is still at the colonel's side.

"Don't go in!" he pleads.

Then they all see it. Yes—it is Yvonne—but not Yvonne's expression. She sees the men in front of her. The searchlight discloses streaks of blood on her body, for she is naked except for a strip of cloth around her thighs. But her face is the thing they see. Only a few feet in front of them she stops. A fiendish grin slits her beautiful face. Then as if getting her breath, she rushes toward the nearest man, her hands reaching before her like claws ready to gouge and bite her victims!

Her father runs to her—she must be raving mad—he will hold her. But as he is about to touch her, she turns on him, rushes at him savagely. Then only inches away, just as she clears the swamp, she falls at her father's feet in utter collapse.

They carry her further up the hill and place her on a blanket. Her shoulders and breasts are covered with scores of bite marks. Her father covers her gently from the gaze of soldiers. She moans and gradually begins regaining consciousness.

Can Such Things Be?

Minutes later, she opens her eyes, recognizes her father and reaches her arms out to him for protection, like a girl awakening from a horrible dream.

"Oh, Father, it was terrible," she says in a low but coherent voice. "He held his hand over my mouth and carried me into the swamp. Then he set me down and began to laugh. Suddenly I saw many horrible faces all around me, but I couldn't see their bodies! An awful sensation came over me. Never before have I felt anything like it. I wanted to kill that man—to bite his neck and scratch his face.

"And before I could help myself I jumped at him and bit him! I never had such strength before. And Father, I *enjoyed* doing it. I saw him drop to the ground and crawl away. Then the faces seemed to lead me on. I kept walking—and began tearing off my clothes. When I saw my body I wanted to bite myself. The faces laughed—encouraging me to do so. Then I saw the light. It made me even madder. I could see men around the light.

I wanted to kill them, too—to bite them to death.

"And Father, when I recognized you, I tried to feel that you were my Father—but I couldn't. I just wanted to kill you—to tear you apart. Then just as you reached for me, something that had been like a fire consuming me, dropped away, and that's all I remember. Please, Father, don't let anybody go into that horrible swamp. If there is a hell—then that must be it."

Weeks later, Yvonne Marchand, fully recovered from her wounds, and back to her normal lovely self, told the same story to the French authorities. Today, the swamp has been entirely eliminated—filled in with dirt and stone from a more godly spot of Mother Earth.

"Just a nightmare," say the skeptics. But if they could meet the beautiful Yvonne Marchand, now married and the mother of healthy children, and hear her tell that story—perhaps they would ponder and remember: "There are more things in heaven and earth . . . than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Phantom Faces

And now let us come closer to home—as late as December, 1938, in Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, Canada, where phantom faces have been sighted in Tabor Cemetery. According to the Winnipeg Free Press, "Growing terror is gripping the hearts of settlers in the Dovetail District, seventeen miles from here. . . . You can get any number of reputable residents who will testify. . . . Strange, eerie tales, all connected with the bleak cemetery section, were told by J. Pirot who has lived in the district for over thirty-five years. . . ."

One man was driving near the region when his motor died. Being a stranger in the vicinity he had heard none of the tales of stalled motors—for many cars had met with similar mishaps near the cemetery. Then suddenly he saw a phantom face. Here is what he says:

"It was not fear, but anger that surged through me. I started the car again, and began to speed, hoping I could see someone in the road—for I wanted to kill! Had anything loomed up in front of me I would have run it down for the sheer joy of slaughter. Not until I had been speeding for several minutes did I finally snap out of it like a person coming out of intoxication. I thanked God that no one had been on that road. I was fully conscious of everything I was doing—but I couldn't help myself. My conscience must have deserted me or been subdued by some unholy force beyond human control."

Urge to Kill

Or let us go to New Jersey where a man is still serving sentence for a murder beyond his control. He had hired a man to drive him to a country village near Plainfield. Suddenly when they were passing

(Continued on page 126)

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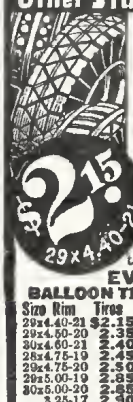

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29x4.50-20	2.35	1.05
30x4.50-21	2.40	1.15
28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.65	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.65	1.25
3.25-17	2.90	1.25
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	2.95	1.35
3.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x5.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x5.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x5.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x5.00-21	3.65	1.65
32x5.50-20	3.75	1.75
6.00-16	3.75	1.45

REGULAR CORD TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3½	$2.35	$0.95
31x4	2.95	1.25
32x4	2.95	1.25
33x4	2.95	1.25
34x4	3.25	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

Size	Tires	Tubes
33x4½	$3.45	$1.45
34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.55
32x6	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES (High Pressure)

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5	$4.25	$1.95
33x5	2.95	1.75
34x5	4.25	2.25
32x6	7.95	2.95
36x6	9.95	4.45

Size	Tires	Tubes
34x7	$10.95	$4.65
38x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
5.00-20	$3.75	$1.65
5.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95

Size	Tires	Tubes
7.50-20	$6.95	$3.75
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9.00-20	10.95	5.65
9.75-20	13.95	6.65

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See WOODSTOCK TYPEWRITERS

(Continued from page 125)

a lonely section of Mt. Horeb, a face loomed up in front of him, like that of "a little black man." For apparently no reason, he drew a pistol from his pocket and shot the driver.

At the trial, the killer was judged "perfectly sane"—although he stuck to his story of the phantom face. In the penitentiary he has been a model prisoner, and has exhibited no signs of insanity.

Even conservative England reports two large mansions which have been allowed to fall to ruins, because no one can remain in them over night. Those who have tried, have suddenly become possessed with an urge to kill. When they rush from the house, they are immediately normal again, and lose their mad passion.

Out of the Darkness

And here is a story told by Malcolm Frone, a printer. It happened to him several years ago when he was hunting for deer in northern New Jersey.

"It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. I came upon a deserted cabin high in the hills. Curious, I looked in the window. I thought at first that some hunters were inside, for I seemed to see smoke coming from a broken-down hearth. Then I realized it wasn't smoke—and through the haze I saw queer faces hovering about. But I could see no bodies.

"Suddenly one hideous face loomed up in front of me and I tried to duck back. But I couldn't. Something seemed to force me to climb through the window. I was no sooner in the room when an awful sensation came over me and I pulled my gun to my shoulder. I wanted to kill somebody and I began to shoot at the faces.

"Then I looked at the wall. A woman's face and shoulders met my gaze. With an ungodly pleasure I lifted my gun again and shot to kill that woman, gloating in anticipation of seeing her bullet-ridden body.

"Then I must have fainted, for when I came to, it was dark. Fully conscious and normal, I lit a match. I was still in that musty room, but all was quiet and de-

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serted. I had a flashlight in my bag, so I began to investigate, remembering the horrible experience of a few hours before. Had I killed a woman? I flashed the light on the wall.

"Thank God! I had shot at an old calendar containing the head and shoulders of a beautiful woman. The calendar was eight years old. Then I discovered bullet marks all over the walls where I had fired at the phantom faces!

. . . And Sudden Death

"When I told my story to friends, they would not believe me. I was almost convinced that I had gone temporarily insane and had imagined seeing those faces. But why had I had that awful desire to kill?

"It was not until the following spring when a native of that village near the mountain told me that I was not the first one to see phantoms in that deserted cabin. It was due to my testimony, that the township committee had that old cabin burned down—'to protect hunters who might stop at that place in the future.'

"I have since discovered that seven hunters have been found 'accidentally shot' in the past few years in that section of the mountains. But none of them were shot after I had had my experience. It is my fervent prayer that if anyone in America has had an experience similar to mine and is afraid to tell the authorities for fear of being laughed at, he will contact me for I will do all I can to see that the local authorities destroy any building or location that harbors the demons of the damned.

"I swear by everything that is holy, that if I had killed some hunter or friend in that moment of 'devil possession,' it would not have been my fault. I don't want such a thing to happen to anyone else. And I can prove by five noted doctors that I am not insane."

Hypnotism of the Unholy . . . devil possession . . . split personalities . . . flaming passion of the demons of the damned? Who knows?

—LUCIFER.

LETTERS FROM READERS

IT'S hot as the devil—pun intended!—but we don't mind telling you that the mountain of letters in front of us, though not a cooling sight, is mighty gratifying. Your letters are swell—we wish we could print them all, but we'll have to content ourselves with quoting excerpts from a few of the missives that are fairly typical of the hundreds we've received.

Come to think of it, from the encouraging comments of the majority, that stack

(Continued on page 128)

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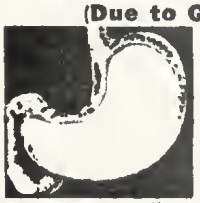

H. H. Bromley, of Rutland, Vt., writes: "I suffered for 10 years with acid-stomach trouble. Doctors all told me I had ulcers and would have to diet the rest of my life. Before taking your treatment I weighed 143 pounds and could eat nothing but soft foods and milk. Now, after taking Von's Tablets, I weigh 171 pounds, can eat almost anything and feel perfectly well." If you suffer from indigestion, gastritis, heartburn, bloating or any other stomach trouble due to gastric hyper-acidity, you, too, should try Von's for prompt relief. Send for FREE Samples of this wonderful treatment, and details of guaranteed trial offer. Instructive Booklet is included. Write

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(Continued from page 127)

of letters *is* a cooling sight in that they're soothing to a feverish editorial brow!

Thanks a lot to all of you—including those who had some adverse criticism to make—for the sincere interest you've taken in STRANGE STORIES. Honestly, we're trying to make it the best magazine on the stands. And your encouragement makes the effort worth while.

Here's a comment from a professional writer from Canada:

Being a writer by profession, I experienced a great thrill in reading a publication hitherto escaping my ever searching eye. May I tender my congratulations to your writers and staff for guiding my pen into a new line of literary accomplishments?

I thoroughly enjoyed Henry Kuttner's effort in CITADEL OF DARKNESS. In the shorter products I chose John L. Benton as the best writer for his SENTENCE OF DEATH. Of course I can easily be wrong, but they caught my attention more quickly than the others. E. Hoffmann Price's work, I thought, was a shade too lurid to be convincing, but he was very good otherwise.

Phil A. Thompson.
Woodroffe, Ontario.

And here are some excerpts from a long letter by a reader who rated all of our past issues in detail. We have considered same, but unfortunately have not the space to print it all:

Your magazine is the best 15c mag. on anybody's stand. Yeseir!. . . . You sure have a fine staff of writers and some very good stories. . . . Please keep your thirteen stories per issue. Long stories of this type of fiction are, as a rule, not so interesting, I have found—and I have been reading weird fiction for twenty years or so—unless they are written by a master, and love element in weird fiction is something that is also hard to handle. It usually spoils a good story.

That is why I rate the longer stories below the short stories, most of which ring up a perfect score.

Swell issues. Can't see how you do it. Keep this up and I'll be with you for life. . . . Bloch always good. . . . A. H. Verrill my favorite science fiction writer. . . . Would appreciate it very much if you would say a brief word in your department that I collect weird fiction and would like to hear from folks who have same.

Chester A. Payfer.
Rt. No. 3, Yale, Michigan.

And from an enthusiastic fan of STRANGE STORIES:

August issue: SNAKE GODDESS, perfect. THE BOHEMIAN perfect. PINK ELEPHANTS — Can't Bloch ever turn out a yarn that isn't glorious? It isn't natural for an author to be so consistently perfect. MRS. ELTING DOES HER PART, perfect. A SENTENCE OF DEATH, good. SILENT IS THE CLOCK, perfect. SAGASTA'S LAST, perfect, so are all of Carl Jacobi's stories. MEMOIR FOR LUCAS PAYNE, a little gem. FLOWERS FROM THE MOON, grand. DEATH BRIDGE, perfectly fascinating. THE CURSE OF THE CROCODILE, oh, boy, what a yarn! SEA VISION, good. THE CITADEL OF DARKNESS, fair.

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but what a grand Finlay drawing. Try and get Seabury Quinn to write for you.

Harold F. Keating.

Quincy, Mass.

Now, regarding the question of republishing a classic weird short from our companion magazine, THRILLING MYSTERY, we have had a number of affirmative responses, but here's one from a feminine fan that's worth examining:

There's an old saying about everybody to his own taste. The people who happen to like a certain type of story just can't seem to get enough of it. They'll buy up every book that has that type of story. So I'll consider it a great injustice if you start printing the type of stories that THRILLING MYSTERY has. They may be all right, but unique stories like those in STRANGE STORIES are very rare on the market. So please keep it as it is.

Antoinette Hare.

Chicago, Ill.

There may be some misunderstanding about the request made in our last issue by one of our readers. We have no intention of changing the type of stories in this magazine, and we didn't interpret Mr. Forrest's letter that way.

THRILLING MYSTERY, for the most part, has its own type, but as Mr. Forrest indicated, there have been some excellent weird short stories in that magazine from time to time that would *fit* into STRANGE STORIES.

How do the rest of you readers feel about this? Remember, we want to keep posted on your reactions to everything in STRANGE STORIES!

Oh, yes, one final word. We're a little disappointed in the response to our appeal for suggestions concerning the Black Arts Club. Many of you advocate the club, but we would like some cooperation before we start. So come on, you Black Arts fans, let's see a letter about the club from each and every one of you. This is the last call. We want not only suggestions—but also some personal comments, experiences and observations regarding the eerie, weird and uncanny. The Black Arts Club is about to come into existence—and we intend to make it a real live club, one worth belonging to. You'll have to contribute your share sooner or later in order to become a member. So start in right now! Thanks.

—THE EDITOR.

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

•

THE CRAWLING CORPSE

A Novelet of Bizarre Sorcery

By ELI COLTER

•

PLUS TWELVE OTHER GRIPPING TALES OF THE UNCANNY

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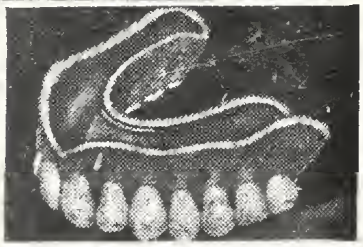
ELSIE E. BOLAND, Norton, Kansas, writes:

"Enclosed find two pictures. One shows how I looked before I got my teeth; the other one, afterwards. Your teeth are certainly beautiful. They look more natural than some that cost three and four times what I paid for mine."



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MRS. MARTHA A. WEBB, Jacksonville, Florida, writes: "My plate is not only a perfect fit, but a beautiful piece of work. I took my own impression under your instructions without the least difficulty. I could not have duplicated my plate here for less than four times the price you charged me."

MR. RAYMOND MILLS, Elgin, Illinois, writes: "It affords me great pleasure to inform you that I have experienced no difficulty in using this plate with comfort and without the assistance of any dental adhesive. I am now able to masticate different varieties of food, as well as raw apples and hard candy, just as well as I did with my natural teeth. During the trial period, not a single sign of gum soreness developed."

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We make to measure to fit you individually—BY MAIL—the World's No. 1 FIT-RITE Dental Plates for men and women—from an impression of your own mouth taken quickly and easily by our FIT-RITE improved method. We have thousands of enthusiastic satisfied customers all over the country wearing teeth we made by mail at sensible prices.

AT ROCK-BOTTOM PRICE

If you find out what others have paid for theirs, you will be astounded when you see how little ours will cost you! By reading our catalog, you will learn how to save half or more on dental plates for yourself. Monthly payments possible.

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Make us prove you can't beat our fit, work or price. Wear our teeth on trial for as long as 60 days. Then, if you are not perfectly satisfied with them, they will not cost you a cent.

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No money need be risked. We guarantee that if you are not completely satisfied with the teeth we make for you, then any time within 60 days we will immediately refund every cent you have paid us for them. We take your word.

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OUR dentures are set with life-like, pearly-white, genuine, porcelain teeth; constructed from finest materials, with expert workmanship, to give life-long service. We make all styles of plates. A dentist who has had many years' experience in making and fitting dental plates, that look right and fit right supervises the making of each plate.

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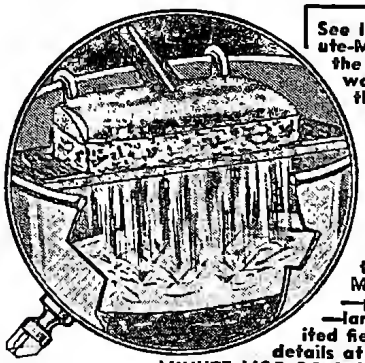

See illustration of Minute-Mop pressed on-to the drain shelf and water draining into the bucket. Note the draining attachment merely hooks onto any ordinary bucket.

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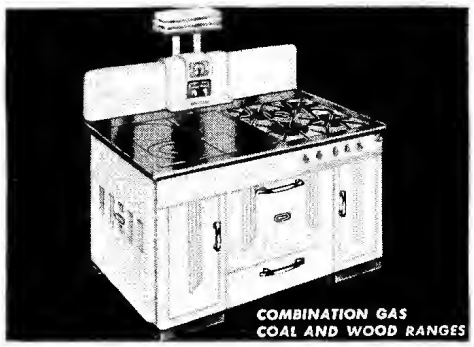
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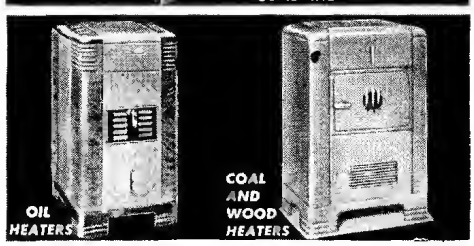

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